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*Edited by*
D. W. HARDING L. C. KNIGHTS
F. R. LEAVIS DENYS THOMPSON

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# THE AMERICAN CULTURAL SCENE

## (I) POLITICAL THOUGHT

THIS is pre-eminently an age of politics, in which political criteria are extended to every human activity, and no branch of culture can successfully claim independence. It is therefore appropriate that in this communication, which is intended to be the first of a series discussing different aspects of the American cultural scene, I should make some comments on American political thinking. In literature the past half-dozen years in the United States have, by contrast with the twenties, been disappointing. The discussion of fundamental political problems, on the other hand, appears to be achieving a scope and a clarity comparable to the great debates which preceded the adoption of the American constitution in the eighteenth century and the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth.

The basic problem of modern politics is that of reconciling the ideals of liberalism—individual freedom, political equality, representative government, and the rule of law—with an industrialized society. Attempts to preserve capitalism appear to lead inexorably to Fascism, while the only visible alternative to private capitalism is the totalitarian dictatorship of the Soviets. An unplanned society ends in chaos, while planning, whether by the Right or by the Left, apparently involves the rule of a bureaucracy and the suppression of individual freedom. In the United States this problem is presented in its purest form. The task of reconciling liberalism and industrialism is not complicated by any relics of feudalism, any traditions of aristocratic rule and imperialist supremacy, or by any pressing need for military self-defence. Liberal doctrine, written into the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, is the basis of American national self-consciousness, and has at least the nominal allegiance of every political party.

The United States, moreover, is more favourably situated than any other great power. Here, if anywhere, it should be possible to create a more stable economic order without war, revolution and dictatorship. If the American people are handicapped by a long tradition of violence and contempt for law in civil disputes, and by a form of government which, in spite of the extraordinary reverence which it inspires, is one of the clumsiest political mechanisms ever contrived—characterized as it is by a division of authority which prevents efficient action, promotes conflicts, and encourages irresponsibility—they have the advantages of controlling a continental area large enough for self-sufficiency, of not being dependent on a colonial empire or on any large foreign trade, and by being separated by four thousand miles of water from the nearest enemy bombing planes. These facts make the political debate now in progress in the United States of more than local importance.

Right and Left, moreover, are to some degree in agreement about principles—an agreement sufficiently large to make discussion possible. The rationale of capitalism in America has always been provided by an interpretation of eighteenth-century liberal doctrine which emphasizes the rule of law and the freedom of the individual to do what he likes with his property and which, as developed by the Supreme Court in the latter part of the nineteenth century, virtually prohibited any interference with business activities by the government. Business leaders have never, as in Europe, functioned directly as part of a ruling class ; they have instead remained aloof from the state, seeking immunity from it by a series of legal devices rather than domination over it. Even vigilante action against trade unions, which is apt to resemble Fascism in embryo, claims justification on the pretext that unionism interferes with the worker's freedom of contract. The parties of the Left, on the other hand, base themselves equally on the liberalism of the American Revolution, but insist that the realization of its ideals has become incompatible with private capitalism. Even the Communist Party now describes its programme as the Americanism of the twentieth century. and treasures the memory of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. For an understanding of modern society the Left may turn to Marx or—more profitably, perhaps—to the greatest of the American critics of capitalism, Thorstein

Veblen ; but its ideals are those of the Declaration of Independence.

The identification—in the United States—of capitalism with the ideal of individual freedom means that some of the most vigorous enemies of Fascism are also among the most ardent champions of capitalism. Such is notably the case with the two most influential political commentators in the country, Mr. Walter Lippmann and Miss Dorothy Thompson, who may be considered as the representatives of the Right.[1] Mr. Lippmann, who was once a socialist and is now on the staff of the conservative *Herald-Tribune*, is the author of *The Good Society*, which is probably the ablest defence of private capitalism which has appeared in our time. Arguing that any form of planned economy is incompatible with freedom, and that the state can never plan for prosperity but only for war, he presents the case for what may be called a positive programme of *laissez-faire*, a programme not of state inactivity, the adoption of which in the nineteenth century caused, in Mr. Lippmann's opinion, the *laissez-faire* attitude to be discredited, but of positive state action to maintain freedom and equality of competition. The difficulty with such a programme is that it requires a state which is both stronger than that of any modern democracy and, at the same time, more impartial. Such a combination appears to be a political impossibility ; and Mr. Lippmann's lack of realism betrays itself in an excessively rhetorical and exhortatory style. As an attack on economic planning, however, the book presents a case which, if not unanswerable, emphatically deserves an answer. A study of it should be regarded as an indispensable method of intellectual self-discipline by all Left-wing theorists.

A variant on the capitalist-socialist antithesis is presented by the American distributivists (who prefer to call themselves ' agrarians '). In contrast with their English equivalents, Messrs. Chesterton and Belloc, they are intellectually respectable, present an attitude which is, perhaps, not wholly impracticable, and can plausibly claim to represent the true American tradition. Small

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[1] I exclude Mr. Lawrence Dennis, who writes in defence of Fascism, but who is too intellectual to have any influence over the sort of people who are apt to become Fascists. Fascistic movements exist in the United States, but they do not put forward any doctrines which it is possible to discuss.

proprietors, especially in agriculture, remain an important independent force in American politics ; and the argument that freedom is possible only in a society based on private property widely distributed can claim to be supported by all historical experience. Distributivism originated in the 'twenties as a movement of intellectuals in the Southern states, who proposed to defend the Southern farmer and the Southern way of life from being exploited and destroyed by capitalistic forces centred in the North. With this movement for regional autonomy were associated a number of the more interesting younger writers (among others—John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Caroline Gordon, Donald Davidson, Robert Penn Warren). The recent symposium, *Who Owns America ?*, edited by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate, presents distributivism as a principle not only for the South but for America as a whole. The political influence of the group is, at present, negligible, though its literary importance has been considerable ; but its ideals probably correspond with those of a large proportion of the American people, and should be regarded as a theoretical formulation of attitudes which, on a lower intellectual plane, play an important role in American politics.

Reading from right to left, we arrive next at those who advocate a reformed capitalism, believing that state action can ensure economic stability without any revolutionary change in the present ownership. This is roughly the viewpoint of the Roosevelt administration (though it is impossible to discover in its various experiments any consistent programme) and is likely to be the dominant attitude in American politics for some time to come. Probably the ablest exponent of such an attitude is Mr. Jerome Frank, a New Deal administrator and the author of *Save America First*. A planned capitalism, as Mr. Frank realizes, involves autarchy ; unrestricted foreign trade puts an economic system at the mercy of world forces beyond national control. The United States, moreover, cannot sell to Europe on any large scale unless she first lends Europe the money with which to buy. Autarchy is impossible in European countries because none of them (except Russia) has sufficient territory and natural resources ; the primary need of Europe is continental unity—a consummation which, according to Mr. Frank, has always been prevented by Great Britain, who cannot dominate Europe herself and has traditionally

fought any other power which threatened to do so.[1] The United States, however, is capable of self-sufficiency. Mr. Frank's programme is to accept monopolistic control of industry, to equalize consumption with production by lowering prices, and to persuade the present owners of the industrial system that, in their own interest, they should prevent revolutionary upheavals by ensuring sufficient mass purchasing power. The role of individual freedom in such a programme remains obscure, but there appears to be no theoretical reason for regarding it as impracticable; economists are substantially in agreement that what is wrong with the American economic system is the high price policy of monopolies. The chief reason for scepticism is that, judging from past experience, it is doubtful whether the rulers of American big business are capable of displaying a sufficient degree of intelligent farsightedness.

It is a striking illustration of the bewilderment of the non-Communist Left—in a world increasingly dominated by competing totalitarianisms—that their immediate proposals approximate to those of Mr. Frank. The two recent Left-wing pronunciamentos which have attracted most attention are *The Prospects of American Democracy* by Professor George S. Counts, and *It Is Later Than*

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[1]At this point it may appropriately be remarked that the problem of American foreign policy is being debated as vigorously as that of social reconstruction. Roughly speaking, the Right (bankers and industrialists) and the extreme Left (the Communist Party), both of whom have private axes to grind, are anti-isolationist ; moderate opinion, remembering 1919 a little too bitterly, remains doubtful. It seems likely, however, that this question may settle itself. For reasons which the present writer has never been able to fathom, the American State Department is incapable of acting in European affairs except as a subsidiary of the British Foreign Office (an example of this is the American participation in the Spanish ' non-intervention ' policy, in spite of the fact that a majority of the American people, including—according to a reliable investigation—forty-two per cent. of the Catholics, are pro-Loyalist). Popular support for active intervention in Europe can, however, be gained only if it is presented as a crusade to save democracy ; and it is obvious that there are few things in which the British Foreign Office is less interested than saving democracy.

*You Think* by Professor Max Lerner. Both, taking warning by Russia, offer vigorous defences of civil liberties ; and both, taking warning by Germany, recognize that no programme of proletarian revolution is likely to succeed. Neither of them, however, grapples with the problem of how to reconcile freedom with a planned society ; and Mr. Lerner, after presenting the case for a popular front, offers as its immediate policy a plan not for changing capitalism into socialism but for making capitalism work by co-operating with it in a policy of increased production and lower prices.

The long-term aims of a popular front, both in the United States and in Europe, require clarification ; in practice it is apt to be purely defensive—a fatal attitude for any Left-wing movement to adopt. A theoretical basis for such a clarification appears to the present writer to be provided by *Communism, Fascism, or Democracy*, by Eduard Heimann. This is the ablest critique of Marxism with which I am acquainted ; its argument is strikingly simple and lucid, and it deserves much wider attention than it has received. Adopting as his criterion of democracy the principle that each man should be independent in his work, he argues that this was the basis of the eighteenth-century liberalism of Adam Smith, whose economic theses were predicated on small-scale production by individual producers, and that the same principle modified by the acceptance of co-operation in large-scale production, was the original basis of Marxism. Marx, however, assumed that large-scale production was in process of becoming universal, whereas actually important areas of the modern economic system are still in the possession of small producers. The forcible imposition of collectivism upon small producers in Russia has led to Communist totalitarianism, whereas in Germany and elsewhere the stubborn opposition of the small producers to collectivism has made inevitable the triumph of Fascism. A consistent application of the true principles of economic democracy, common both to liberalism and to socialism, leads to a pluralistic economic system, combining co-operative workers' ownership of large-scale industry, with private ownership of farms and small-scale industry. Such an attitude, with its emphasis on humanistic value rather than on economic efficiency, offers an escape from the impasse into which Communist dictatorship has led the Left-wing movement ; and, being based on a single consistent principle, may—if translated into terms of a long-

term political programme—redeem the alliance of the workers and the middle class in a popular front from opportunism.

The viewpoints which I have discussed appear to be representative specimens of American politico-economic theory, in so far as it achieves serious intellectual formulation. In the United States, as elsewhere, it is difficult not to wonder for how much longer it will still be possible to debate political questions and to disagree about them, and how soon discussion may disappear in a rising flood of irrationality and fanaticism. Yet considering the vast area of the United States (which makes it difficult for any one movement to seize control of it), its continental variety of races and cultures, and its long tradition of tolerance and optimism, one can plausibly hope that it will not succumb to the totalitarian blight now spreading over Europe. Such hopes derive encouragement from a reading of *My America*, by Louis Adamic, an immigrant from Jugo-Slavia, who has been a resident of the United States for twenty years. *My America* is an autobiography recording investigations of different aspects of the American scene, more especially in the fields of trade unionism and of liberal and Left-wing politics, during the past decade. Mr. Adamic is sometimes naïve, is often verbose, and is over-fond of the first person singular. I know, however, of no book which conveys a more adequate impression of the more significant currents of thought and feeling in present-day America, or of how the peoples of America differ in mentality and viewpoint from those of Europe, and why they may escape from the maladies with which Europe is infected. And in the post-Munich world any writer who can present plausible reasons for optimism deserves our gratitude.

H. B. PARKES.

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*An Inquiry into the Principles of the Good Society*, by Walter Lippmann (Little Brown ; published in Great Britain by Allen and Unwin).

*Who Owns America ?*, edited by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Houghton Mifflin).

*Save America First*, by Jerome Frank (Harpers).

*The Prospects of American Democracy*, by G. S. Counts (John Day).

*It Is Later Than You Think*, by Max Lerner (Viking).

*Communism, Fascism or Democracy*, by Eduard Heimann (W. W. Norton).

*My America*, by Louis Adamic (Harpers).

# 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS'

'I don't care about physiology of matter—but somehow—that which is physic—non-human in humanity, is more interesting to me than the old-fashioned human element—which causes one to conceive a character in a certain moral scheme and make him consistent.'—D. H. Lawrence.

BY common consent there is something wrong with *Wuthering Heights*, and greater nonsense has been written in an effort to bring this blemish to light than has been occasioned by perhaps any other novel. In fact, *Wuthering Heights* has now become the *enfant terrible* of the English Novel, and critics hurry past with little more than a furtive glance at this regrettable deviation from the norm of sanity and health. A. A. Jack, for example, writes in the Cambridge History:

'It is not desirable to read; to take *Wuthering Heights* from the shelf is to prepare for oneself no pleasure.'

If this is being rather more frank than most commentators, that is the only point of difference. The prevailing opinion is that the novel is most oppressive—'It is undoubtedly too morbid and humorless to reach the highest excellence,'[1] and that the bleakness of the Yorkshire moors would be sufficiently cathartic without introducing Heathcliff as well. Charlotte Brontë, who cannot be accused of lacking sympathy, found herself forced to say:

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[1]Pelham Edgar: *The Art of the Novel*, Macmillan.

> ' Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliffe, I do not know: I scarcely think it is.'

But one cannot help feeling that, if the matter were made one of ' right or advisable,' it would not be Emily who would be condemned, but Charlotte herself, who created the mad Mrs. Rochester:

> ' " It was a discoloured face—it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments! . . . [she] was purple: the lips were swelled and dark ; the brow furrowed ; the black eyebrows widely raised over the bloodshot eyes." '

The point is, of course, that few people object to Mrs. Rochester because she only exists in the assertion, she is not realized artistically and consequently never impinges on the imagination ; whereas Heathcliff arouses various kinds of disapproval, from disgust to fear, precisely because he is so vividly present to the emotions of the reader.

That anyone could create such a character as Heathcliff, a man who ' stands unredeemed ; never once swerving in his arrow-straight course to perdition,'[1] naturally leads to observations about Emily Brontë herself. The most respectable of these appear in *The Common Reader* ; Virginia Woolf at any rate appreciates *Wuthering Heights*, even if she seems not to understand it fully. She writes:

> ' Emily was inspired by some more general conception. The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering or her own injuries. She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within herself the power to unite it in a book. The gigantic ambition is to be felt throughout the novel—a struggle, half thwarted but of superb conviction, to say something through the mouths of her characters which is not merely " I love " or " I hate " but " we, the whole human race " and " you, the eternal powers . . . " the sentence remains unfinished.'

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[1]Charlotte Brontë, in her Preface to the 1850 edition of the novel.

When one considers how unsympathetic Virginia Woolf might be expected to find *Wuthering Heights*, the somewhat mystical tone of her remarks will not appear unnatural ; but, unnatural or not, it seems highly improbable that Emily Brontë did any looking out 'upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder,' and though it is no doubt very hard to understand how she could have written such a novel, little can be gained by attempting to explain the phenomenon. Explanations tend to become vulgar, and Miss Romer Wilson, whose biography of Emily Brontë is entitled *All Alone*, expends considerable energy in distorting the facts when she writes:

> 'There is Emily at Haworth, exiled from love, with a man's soul in her female body, hell tormenting her, poetry adding to the torment.'

Actually, in the thirty years she lived, Emily Brontë pursued an entirely normal existence, which was not in the least romantic or in the smallest degree interesting, one would have supposed, to creative biographers. Contrary to the impression that one might get from the novel, she does not appear to have been in any way gloomy or pessimistic. In 1845, while writing her novel, she wrote in the second of her two scraps of diary:

> 'I am quite content for myself: not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, and having learnt to make the most of the present and long for the future with the fidgetiness that I cannot do all I wish ; seldom if ever troubled with nothing to do, and merely desiring that everybody could be as comfortable as myself and as undesponding, and then we should have a very tolerable world of it.'

Her tranquillity was conditional, however, upon her remaining at Haworth, and of the few years when she was sent away to school, Charlotte writes:

> 'The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial life to one of disciplined routines was what she failed in enduring. Her nature was too strong for her fortitude. Every morning, when she woke, the visions of home

and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home.'

This nostalgia, which contributes to the main theme of the novel, informs much of Emily Brontë's poetry:

> There is a spot, 'mid barren hills,
> Where winter howls, and driving rain;
> But, if the weary tempest chills,
> There is a light that warms again.

But on the whole the poems do not offer much biographical interest, but rather are remarkable for a fine normality and an emotional strength not common in Victorian verse. This can be seen very clearly if one compares *Remembrance* with the relevant parts of *In Memoriam*. Emily Brontë is obviously writing with her finger on a keen experience,[1] and she reveals an unwillingness to sentimentalize and indulge her emotion that makes her a much more masculine poet than most of her male contemporaries.

But the distinction of her best poems, however indisputable it may be, can hardly compare with that of the novel. From the first page to the last one is aware of a rigid control and a clarity of execution that are truly remarkable. There is no trace at any point of emotional indulgence, and this in a work which operates throughout at very considerable pressure. A short quotation may serve to enforce this point. The scene is the death of Frances, Hindley's wife:[2]

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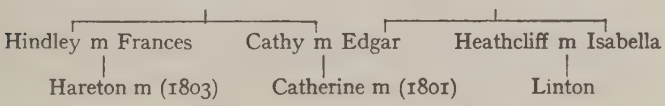
[1]That the poem appears to have no foundation in fact in no way invalidates this statement, as one does not demand that the experience at the root of the work of art should have taken place in actuality. Marvell's *Coy Mistress* is an equally factitious poem from this point of view.

[2]In order to help in following the analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, I append the family-tree of the Earnshaws, Lintons, and Heathcliffs, worked out by C.P.S. in *The Structure of Wuthering Heights*:

> ' . . . but one night, while leaning on his shoulder in the act of saying she thought she should be able to get up tomorrow, a fit of coughing took her—a very slight one—he raised her in his arms ; she put her two hands about his neck, her face changed, and she was dead.'

The delicate assurance of this passage does not depend upon the use of an emotive vocabulary ; the words, in contrast to the situation described, are colourless, and force attention above all on the precision of the movement. Up to ' a fit of coughing took her ' the prose runs smoothly, with Frances convincing herself that she is now better ; but with the dash, the prose takes on a quivering and panting motion, and then as it were loses its balance, and falls. And it is because the staple of the prose of *Wuthering Heights* is of this quality that one has confidence in asserting with D. H. Lawrence that ' it is a great book.'

*Wuthering Heights*, it should be quite evident, is not an unpleasant novel, and one of the main purposes of this analysis will be to demonstrate that it is in fact a very precisely balanced structure of 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant,' 'normal' and 'abnormal.' Far from giving way to melodrama and self-indulgence, Emily Brontë relegates all the potentially unhealthy elements to their place in the artistic whole, and the novel moves continually towards a resolution of perfect tranquillity. At the centre of *Wuthering Heights* lies, of course, the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff ;[1] for the second half of the book there is a closely allied theme, the relationship between Catherine and Hareton, the latter theme acting, in its similarity to the former, as a commentary, though upon a very different emotional plane. There are in addition several subsidiary themes which serve to determine and qualify the




[1]For the sake of clarity I refer throughout to Catherine Earnshaw, with whom Heathcliff is in love, as ' Cathy,' and to her daughter, Catherine Linton, as ' Catherine.'

attitude to be adopted by the reader. The novel is almost entirely recounted by two observers, Mrs. Dean and Lockwood, for much the greater part by the former. Lockwood, in fact, has no more than the first and the last words, and for the rest he merely listens to Mrs. Dean's story as a representative of a world foreign to the events that take place. As such he tends to be both uncomprehending and insensitive ; he explains, for instance, that his search for solitude is to help him forget an unsuccessful love-affair :

> ' While enjoying a month of fine weather at the sea-coast, I was thrown into the company of a most fascinating creature : a real goddess in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me. I " never told my love " vocally ; still, if looks have language, the merest idiot might have guessed I was head over ears . . . '

The vulgarity of this is enforced by the flat and lifeless prose ; and the absurdity of Lockwood's passion helps to bring out by contrast the significance of the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship. Lockwood's response, at subsequent points in the novel, is more or less what the response of the ordinary reader might be expected to be. At first unsympathetic, he is by the end entirely reconciled to all that has taken place. He has not long made the acquaintance of Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights before he feels that

> ' The dismal spiritual atmosphere of the place overcame, and more than neutralised the glowing physical comforts around me ; and I resolved to be cautious how I ventured under the rafters a third time.'

Having thus recorded the natural reaction of an observer as yet unacquainted with the deeper cross-currents of emotion, Lockwood tends to suspend judgment until the end of the novel.

Mrs. Dean's function in the novel cannot be so simply stated ; she may be said to act as Chorus with the difference that she offers a point of view which is not altogether disinterested. As raconteuse she naturally has to move upon a plane of normal and sometimes trivial consciousness that excludes her to some extent from the emotional atmosphere of the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship ; but this apart, she represents the maximum objectivity possible to any active participant in the events described. Her essential qualifications appear when Lockwood says to her :

' "Excepting a few provincialisms of slight consequence, you have no marks of the manners which I am habituated to consider peculiar to your class. I am sure you have thought a great deal more than the generality of servants think. You have been compelled to cultivate your reflective faculties for want of occasions for frittering away your life in silly trifles."

Mrs. Dean laughed.

" I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body," she said ; " not exactly from living among the hills and seeing one set of faces, and one series of actions, from year's end to year's end ; but I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom: and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also . . . " '

The key-words—' think,' ' reflective faculties,' ' steady,' ' reasonable,' ' sharp discipline,' ' wisdom '—emphasize the essential normality, the spiritual poise which informs the whole novel. And it is important that Mrs. Dean's ' wisdom ' is not an exclusively rural heritage, and comes ' not exactly from living among the hills ' ; it is also derived from a wide reading, and it is this which endows her with a width and generosity of opinion that contrast very strongly with the narrow calvinism of old Joseph, who says to Heathcliff:

' " Aw hed aimed tuh dee, where Aw'd sarved fur sixty year . . . " '

If Lockwood is not to be trusted as a commentator, he being almost a foreigner, nor is Joseph, who is too exclusively part of the environment to offer any semblance of impartiality.

The central theme, as has been suggested, is the relationship between Cathy and Heathcliff. Emily Brontë, however, has no particular concern with the surface appearance of this relationship, but insists throughout on its inner tension. To Mrs. Dean, Cathy is explicit:

' " This is for the sake of one [Heathcliff] who comprehends in his person my feelings to Edgar [Cathy's future husband] and myself. I cannot express it ; but surely you and everybody have

a notion that there is or should be an existence beyond you. What were the use of my creation if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries ; and I have watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff. He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable . . . " '

Elsewhere she says:

' " Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." '

And Heathcliff, speaking of the dead Cathy, says:

' " I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!" '

Though the point should not be much laboured, there exists a distinct similarity between these passages and the one by Charlotte describing Emily's enforced absence from Haworth ; and the comparison serves to emphasize the non-personal nature of the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship.

The key-sentence in the first passage quoted is ' My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath.' This imagery drawn from nature, and particularly from its sterner elements, is recurrent in the descriptions of Heathcliff. Mrs. Dean describes him as being ' hard as whinstone,' and when he and the refined Edgar appear together, she says that ' The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley.' Cathy is even more outspoken, and describes him as an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone.' But, in contrast with the ' red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments ' of Mrs. Rochester, Heathcliff is presented as being physically quite attractive. Lockwood finds that ' he has an erect and handsome

figure,' and Mrs. Dean says that 'his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace.' In so far as Heathcliff is abnormal, if that is the right word, it is an abnormality that tends to lie below the level of social deportment. Cathy says:

> '"Pray don't imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's not a rough diamond —a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man."'

Heathcliff himself relates how he has 'taught him [his son] to scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak'; and later he says: 'It's odd what a savage feeling I have to anything that seems afraid of me.' And finally Isabella, his wife, contributes to the impression of the non-human element in Heathcliff, when she asks: 'Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?'

With the death of Cathy, however, what was once latent now emerges, and Heathcliff ceases to be dignified. Mrs. Dean relates how, just before her death, he 'foamed like a mad dog'; and he himself says: 'You know, I was wild after she died.' The balanced relationship is now broken up, and a great contrast is evident between Cathy and Heathcliff. Mrs. Dean says of the former:

> '. . . hers [was the hush] of perfect peace. Her brow smooth, her lids closed, her lips wearing the expression of a smile; no angel in heaven could be more beautiful than she appeared. And I partook of the infinite calm in which she lay; my mind was never in a holier frame than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest . . . To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection; but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity.'

As for Heathcliff, Mrs. Dean finds him 'leant against an old ash tree.' After talking to him, she relates:

> 'He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears.'

The contrast is not only one of verbal description, but also of movement ; the Cathy passage runs very smoothly and evenly, and reflects the ' tranquillity ' ; whereas the Heathcliff passage is lumpy and awkward to read, generally uneasy in motion. The contrast persists, by implication, till the end of the novel. Heathcliff's behaviour remains weird and unnatural. He now bends all his energies towards bringing under one control the two properties of Wuthering Heights, where he has lived, and Thrushcroft Grange, where Cathy lived with her husband, Edgar Linton. This undertaking, symbolizing his desire to be re-united with Cathy, obsesses him, and he lets nothing stand in his way. He shows, for instance, considerable subtlety and brutality in arranging the marriage between Linton, his son, and Catherine, to whom Thrushcroft Grange will belong on the death of Edgar. The essential clue to his behaviour is supplied by Catherine, who says to him:

> ' " Mr. Heathcliff, *you* have *nobody* to love you ; and, however miserable you make us, we still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery!" '

But, once the mundane union has been effected, Heathcliff subsides. He goes and looks at Cathy in her coffin—' " I saw her face again—it is hers yet " '—and says to Mrs. Dean:

> ' " She [Cathy] has disturbed me, night and day through eighteen years—incessantly—remorsely—till yesternight ; and yesternight I was tranquil. I dreamt I was sleeping the last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped and my cheek frozen against hers." '

He now has ' a single wish,' and his ' whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it.' The ordinary physical demands of life have no more interest for him: ' " I have to remind myself to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat!" ' He moves nearer and nearer towards the unspecified goal ; ' " I'm too happy, and yet I'm not happy enough. My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself." ' And finally Mrs. Dean relates:

> ' Mr. Heathcliff was there—laid on his back. His eyes met mine so keen and fierce, I started ; and then he seemed to smile . . . he was dead and stark!'

He is buried, as he had demanded, with Cathy ; and the final cadence comes with the small boy's story:

> ' " They's Heathcliff, and a woman, yonder under t' Nab," he blubbered, " un' Aw darnut pass 'em." '

The level on which the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship has moved, and its depersonalized character, make it seem entirely fitting that it should attain equilibrium and tranquillity only with the death of the two persons concerned.

The structure of *Wuthering Heights*, as has been shown by C.P.S. in a Hogarth pamphlet, is truly remarkable for the degree to which it seems to have been artificially constructed, with minute attention paid to details of apparent irrelevance.[1] Analysis reveals, however, that this is not a symptom of misapplied energy and interest in Emily Brontë, but is precisely what gives the novel its coherence. The stresses and contradictions inherent in the Cathy-Heathcliff theme just analysed are reflected in varying ways in all the relationships of the novel ; heredity, above all, plays a structural and unifying rôle that merits some attention at this point. The fundamental conflict emerges in the contrast between the two estates, between Thrushcross Grange—' a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables,' and Wuthering Heights—' the floor was of smooth white stones ; the

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[1]The general theory, of course, is that *Wuthering Heights* is put together in a singularly shoddy manner. H. W. Garrod, in his Introduction to the Oxford Edition (this Introduction is probably one of the most sympathetic and well-meaning pieces of writing on the novel), finds that:

> ' The faults of *Wuthering Heights* proceed, not from defective knowledge of human nature, but from inferior technique, from an insufficient acquaintance with the craft of fiction.'

Other critics have favoured the theory that the novel is by two people, Bramwell writing the first part. This absurdity has been convincingly refuted by Miss Irene Cooper Willis, whose pamphlet, *The Authorship of Wuthering Heights*, published by the Hogarth Press, contains some excellent close analysis of the texture of the prose.

chairs high-backed, primitive structures, painted green.' Thrushcroft Grange is the home of the Lintons, and Edgar and Isabella Linton, together with Frances, stand for refinement and delicacy. In contrast there are Hindley and Cathy Earnshaw and Heathcliff, all of whom were brought up in Wuthering Heights, and develop very roughly and without the civilized graces. In comparison with the ' beautiful fertile valley ' of Edgar, Heathcliff is a ' bleak, hilly coal country.' As a girl Cathy was a ' wild, wicked slip,' but, after staying for some time with the Lintons, she returns ' a very dignified person ' ; the Linton environment tends to eradicate from her the wilder elements that remain in Heathcliff. There are two inter-marriages: Heathcliff marries Isabella, and Cathy marries Edgar. The former marriage is a complete failure ; Heathcliff shatters Isabella, and their son, Linton, is utterly spineless and wastes away rapidly. The second marriage is more successful ; Mrs. Dean believes that Cathy and Edgar ' were really in possession of deep and growing happiness.' Their daughter is Catherine, of whom Mrs. Dean says:

> ' Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother: still she did not resemble her ; for she could be as soft and mild as a doe, and she had gentle voice and pensive expression: her anger was never furious: her love never fierce ; it was deep and tender.'

The implications of these marriages and their offspring are fairly general. The first emphasizes the incompatibility of the Heathcliff and Isabella elements. And the second reveals that there exists a potential sympathy between the two conflicting houses ; Cathy, her nature modified by a stay at Thrushcroft Grange, marries Edgar with comparative success, and their daughter meets with as great approval as Heathcliff's son with contempt from Mrs. Dean. And finally there is Hareton, the son of Frances and Hindley, Cathy's brother. Up till the age of about seventeen, Hareton is almost a replica of Heathcliff, though the Frances influence renders him more subdued, she being an insignificant and frail person. Mrs. Dean says that Heathcliff ' appeared to have bent his malevolence

on making him [Hareton] a brute' ; and not long before Heathcliffe dies, he says:

> ' "Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being . . . his startling likeness to Catherine [Cathy] connected him fearfully with her . . . Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love, of my wild endeavours to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish . . . " '

The differences between the two main themes, Cathy-Heathcliff and Catherine-Hareton, lie, very generally, in the fact that the former is wilder and more Lawrencian. For instance, Cathy and Heathcliff do not marry ; Cathy tells Mrs. Dean that their relationship has no need for sanctions of that kind, and that it is not likely to be affected by her marriage to Edgar. And the same applies to Heathcliff's marriage to Isabella, Edgar's sister. In fact the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship is handled in neither sexual nor even particularly human terms. On the other hand, the Catherine-Hareton theme moves on a plane of normal procedure ; at the end of the novel they are about to be married. And this distinction between the two themes is of fundamental importance: the Catherine-Hareton relationship is the projection into the sphere of ordinary behaviour of the Cathy-Heathcliff relationship ; it is the expression in conventional social terms of the main spiritual conflict. As in the description of Catherine quoted above, on the one hand the anger is ' furious ' and the love ' fierce,' on the other everything is ' soft and mild,' ' gentle,' and ' pensive.'

Between Catherine and Hareton, however, there is no such immediate sympathy as there was between Cathy and Heathcliff. The former relationship being, as has been suggested, a counterpart of the latter, it develops from outside itself. Cathy dies in giving birth to Catherine, and so, just as from this moment she and Heathcliff are separated and only very slowly re-united, similiarly there exists from the first a lack of sympathy between Catherine and Hareton which is only gradually overcome. At their first meeting she mistakes him for a servant, and he retorts:

> ' " I'll see thee damned before I be *thy* servant." '

Heathcliff's struggle to unite the two estates involves marrying

his son, Linton, to Catherine, and this naturally throws her further apart from Hareton. But, once the marriage has taken place (Linton dies almost immediately) and Heathcliff feels himself moving ever closer to Cathy, intimacy between Catherine and Hareton springs up rapidly. And, significantly linking up with Mrs. Dean's remarks about her literary education, it is in teaching Hareton to read and appreciate her books that Catherine gives impetus to this relationship. Mrs. Dean says:

> ' His honest, warm, and intelligent nature shook off rapidly the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it had been bred ; and Catherine's sincere commendations acted as a spur to his industry.'

It is this relationship which meets with Mrs. Dean's approval. Her comments on Heathcliff and Cathy are fundamentally sympathetic, but none the less qualified. After Cathy has told her of her feelings for Heathcliff—' '' Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff!'' '—she says that she ' was out of patience with her folly!' ; and after Cathy's death she says:

> ' Retracing the course of Catherine Linton, I fear we have no right to think she is [happy in the other world] ; but we'll leave her with her Maker.''

And when she finds Heathcliff in the grounds, and sees him dash ' his head against the knotted trunk,' she observes that ' It hardly moved my compassion.' But of Hareton and Catherine she says:

> ' The crown of all my wishes will be the union between these two. I shall envy no one on their wedding-day: there won't be a happier woman than myself in England!'

But the ' union between these two ' symbolises also the final union of Cathy and Heathcliff. The close sympathy between the two themes now emerges clearly. When Heathcliff dies, Hareton ' sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest.' The resolution into tranquillity with which the Cathy-Heathcliff theme ends is paralleled in the Hareton-Catherine theme. As Mrs. Dean tells Lockwood that the latter are going to live at Thrushcroft Grange, they return from a walk.

' "They are afraid of nothing,' I [Lockwood] grumbled, watching their approach through the window. "Together, they would brave satan and all his legions."

As they stepped onto the door-stones, and halted to take a last look at the moon—or, more correctly, at each other, by her light—I felt irresistibly impelled to escape them . . . '

Lockwood, whose sympathies are now fully engaged, goes to find the graves of Edgar, Cathy and Heathcliff.

' I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heather and hare-bells ; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass ; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.'

The even and balanced movement of the prose, and the particularity of the description, bring the novel to a close on a note of great calm and completeness. Suggestions of the novel being 'terrible,' or not 'enjoyable,' are now seen to be possible only as a result of stubborn misreading ; unfortunately this appears to be the sanctioned way of reading *Wuthering Heights*.

BORIS FORD.

# MUSIC IN THE MELTING POT

## CHARLES IVES AND THE MUSIC OF THE AMERICAS

### I.

THE most important point about American music is that America has no musical past. This may sound suspiciously simple ; but we must remember that all the great musics of history have been evolved in a civilization small enough to have a traditional folk-music of its own (though the art-music will not necessarily be ' influenced ' by the folk music but may be complementary, a parallel growth) ; and that huge amorphous industrial America is the antithesis of such a civilization and has never possessed a representative folk-art. It is true that certain regions have a folk-music of somewhat poor vitality, but an art of the people that can be recognized as peculiarly American there never has been or (I imagine) will be. The suggestion has often been made—by the late George Gershwin for instance—that jazz is the universal folk-idiom of America which, if it were true, would be so much the worse for the folk. The palpable absurdity of the suggestion is, however, revealed when we remember that jazz is for the most part written by cosmopolitan Jews, that its conventions are mainly European, and that it is repudiated as a mode of artistic expression by all serious American musicians both in theory and in practice. Jazz has ultimately not much more connection with America than with the rest of the modern world ; America, as Wyndham Lewis remarks, was merely unfortunate enough, because of its comparative youth, to be the first country to become Americanized.

I am not at all sure that in order to be a genuine native American composer it is necessary completely to repudiate the traditions of the music of Europe. But at least one can understand the spirit of the young American composer's almost hysterical insistence on the ' new,' one can appreciate the validity of his

desire to begin *ab ovo*, to shake off the trammels of the academic nineteenth-century European frock-coat in which, at the turn of the century, he seemed doomed indefinitely to languish ; a technical, an idiomatic garb which bore no conceivable relation to the peculiar problems of his personality and his environment. One can even, I think, understand the kind of impatience that provoked Mr. Wallingford Riegger's blunt statement: ' While I do not claim that the possibilities of the major, minor and modal tonalities have been exhausted, I believe that the greatest music in this idiom has probably been written. On the other hand, *specially invented tonalities* (my italics) . . . open up vast fields as yet but little explored.' One can understand it, but can hardly agree, one cannot but regard it as an over-simple attitude. There are more complex questions which it seems to me the American composer must consider, and some of these questions are (a) whether it is *possible* to ' invent ' a new technique (the techniques of European, Asiatic or Indian music being the product of centuries of growth) ; (b) whether such a new technique would be of any use when and if it was invented (how far would it be indicative of new modes of consciousness and how far would these new modes of consciousness, if they existed, be desirable or worth the carrying ; and (c) whether newness has any meaning at all in connection with art except in the sense that all *good* works of art, however traditional, are new, that is, truly creative.

## II.

If we wish to examine the practical application of these problems to American music we cannot do better than to consider the work of Charles Ives. English, or rather European, critics have dismissed him with amused contempt ; American critics dub him a major composer, both of which valuations seem to me ridiculous. What is certain is that he is not critically negligible and that he is, if not a great composer, very nearly a great—a singularly rich and ripe—personality. He is a genuine American type, a man of immense physical energy and competence in practical affairs, of a certain native commonsense, and of a vigorous originality and independence. Between 1890 and 1910 he had effected the revolutions of atonality and polytonality and the

exploration of polyrhythms and polyharmonies which afterwards came to be associated with the most advanced composers of central Europe, and his discoveries ranged, indeed, much further than any European composer had ever dared to go. His adventurousness itself is no proof of merit, nor even of lasting interest ; but it is, as we shall see, suggestive and significant.

By birth Ives was almost a regional composer. His musical education—and it was a valuable one—he gained by listening to the improvisatory out-of-tune village fiddler, and to the curious noises made by the chanting school children and by the village harmonium and choir. Ives himself tells us that the improvisatory treatment of the hymn provided opportunities for displays of artistic skill of a crude, but curiously intense, kind, and it was through listening to the unnotated and perhaps unnotatable art of the villagers that Ives realized that there is not one right way of composing music but many, that music is, after all, only the art of sound, that the one test of rightness is whether the music is sincerely created, the one and only way of doing that particular thing. He tried to build up an original sound-system, a gigantic all-inclusive art-form which embraced within itself much of European, Oriental and most other musics, the improvisatory art of the local villagers, and many other methods of exploiting sound which had never before appeared in any music whatsoever. The mere fact that Ives's music includes so much makes him interesting for the young American composer who is in search of himself ; let us now, therefore, make a few notes on some of Ives's most characteristic technical discoveries, using the term ' technical ' in the limited sense. We will afterwards go on to consider the implications of these technical characteristics—the inner nature and probable value of Ives's *œuvre*.

(1) MELODY.

Ives's attitude to his art is above all anti-pedagogic. He has never made any bones about the fact that he aims at Expression and that he seeks the most immediate and the most ' natural ' way of saying what he has to say. For this reason he seeks an ' inevitable ' continuity between the successive notes of his melody and welcomes anything which provides relief from the cut-and-dried keyboard scales of pre-War European music. He does not wish

to discard entirely ' all principle of tone-unity ' but he believes that there are many possible such principles and that every artist must seek his own. Ives's melodic lines exploit on occasion every known stabilized tone-principle in such simultaneous diversity that they seem to have no tone-principle at all ; but he never ' invents ' any artificial theoretical tone-principle like the duodecuple scale. Similarly Ives has never advocated a quarter-tonal or any other fractional tonal system, but he insists that intervals smaller than a semitone may and should be employed where the immediate exigencies of expression call for them. In the use of intervals smaller than a semitone Ives was guided by the village fiddlers whom he heard in his youth ; he uses these intervals as it were instinctively, in accordance with no system but in order to create some peculiar effect which could be created in no other way. The shape of Ives's melodies is characterized by a huge Whitmanesque sweep, by enormous and exhilarating leaps, and by abrupt pauses ; but since naturalness is the essence of his art, his melodies have almost no recognizable mannerisms and may, when their inner life calls for it, manifest a diatonic simplicity as sweet and smiling as their more customary complexity is fierce and unflinching.

(2) Harmony and Polyphony.

It has often been pointed out that the notorious opposition between the two poles of homophony and polyphony is largely illusory, for you cannot combine melodies together without implying some sort of harmonic discipline, nor can you produce interesting harmony by treating chords as static blocks, or without a measure of flexibility and potency in the basses. Perhaps Ives, above all the ' natural ' musician, realized the artificiality of this opposition ; he writes down what he feels to be necessary, without stopping to consider whether it is homophonic or polyphonic or both simultaneously. Thus multitudes of interwoven melodic strands will be punctuated by enormously complicated (and ' ungrammatical ') masses of chords which can only be considered homophonically. Sometimes Ives will even write for two orchestras playing simultaneously music which is completely different in melodic, harmonic and rhythmic structure, hence the terrifying complexity of much of his work—on paper. Yet always he writes with the most scrupulous regard for the *sound* of his compositions,

and because his means are unfamiliar it does not follow that they are wrong. Ives is really a phenomenal technician in the sense that he invents original and unprecedented methods for saying certain unfamiliar things he has to say (he was using polyharmony—the juxtaposition of contrasting tone-systems—early in the eighteen-eighties). Criticism of the value of his achievement must ultimately go deeper than the justness, the integrity, of means.

(3) Sonority.

Consideration of the simultaneous polyphonic-homophonic nature of Ives's work involves too the question of Sonority. It is the composer's opinion that sound, considered as such (*i.e.*, as noise), is just as much a legitimate musical element as those comparatively few specialized combinations of tones which time and convention have agreed to call ' concordant.' His trick of writing for two orchestras at once, each independent of the other (sometimes the two bands don't even end together) was inspired by his hearing two military bands pass each other on the march. Various strange accidents of aural phenomena such as this seem to be peculiarly fascinating to Ives ; he repeatedly insists that sound coming from a distance, or over water, or through a wood, produces effects of peculiar musical value, and he attempts to find some orchestral, pianistic or vocal equivalent for these effects. Ives writes that he remembers hearing ' when a boy, the music of a band in which the players were arranged in two or three groups around the town square. The main group in the bandstand at the centre usually played the main themes, while the others, from the neighbouring roofs and verandas, played the variations, refrains, and so forth . . . The bandmaster told of a man who, living nearer the variations, insisted that they were the real music and that it was more beautiful to hear the tune come sifting through them than the other way round. Others, walking round the square, were surprised at the different and interesting effects they got as they changed positions . . . ' These and suchlike are the devices explored by Ives in his music. His work is the antithesis of ' abstract ' music—music as an arrangement of ' notes.' Always he is minutely concerned with the *sound* of these notes, the precise timbres they take on when allotted to certain instruments in certain circumstances. In the course of these explorations he exploited masses

of sound, ' noise,' clusters of adjacent semitones, many years before the note-clusters of Henry Cowell.

(4) Rhythm.

All these characteristics we have been discussing depend on, and cannot really be separated from, rhythm, but we have temporarily made this artificial segregation in order to point out that it is in its rhythmic fluidity that Ives's music—and indigenous American music generally—chiefly differs from European music. 'Our rhythmic sense,' writes Roy Harris, ' is less symmetrical than the European rhythmic sense. European musicians are trained to think of rhythm in its largest common denominator, while we are born with a feeling for its smallest units . . . We do not employ unconventional rhythms as a sophistical gesture ; we cannot avoid them . . . Our problem is to put down into translatable rhythms and symbols and consequent melodies and form those that assert themselves within us.' I do not think it is true to suggest that the American rhythmic sense is more *subtle* than the European, certainly I doubt if music of greater rhythmic subtlety than a motet of Vittoria or a madrigal of Wilbye has ever been created in any civilization. Possibly the rhythms natural to the American musical temperament are of greater metrical intricacy, but this is a different matter. Where American music does diverge widely from European music (particularly that of the last two centuries) is in its exploitation of ' harmony of rhythm,' an interwoven texture of different rhythms which proceeding simultaneously make up a whole in the same way as different tones combine together to make a harmony. This sort of harmony of rhythm can be found in Oriental, African and most ' primitive ' musics, but the work of Ives represents probably the first attempt to write such rhythms down. The freedom of Ives's polyphony derives from the fact that each melodic strand proceeds in its own unique and complicated rhythm, independently of its neighbour. Henry Cowell gives an example, by no means an isolated case, of a rhythm-harmony in Ives's music in which different parts move simultaneously in ' 20, 17 and 5 notes to the measure, with other parts taken from rhythms of 12, 10, 6 and 4 to the measure.' And these rhythms are all varied and complicated by tied notes, misplaced accents, overlappings and ellipses within the realm of

each rhythm-system. It is indisputable that rhythm-harmonies are a legitimate means of expression for American composers ; they are in no sense a freakish invention but an ancient and honourable element of the technique of composition which has fallen into disrepute only in comparatively recent times. (Not that European music suffered because rhythm-harmonies were alien to it ; only European music isn't the only sort of music). It is interesting to note also that Ives was using rhythms similar to Stravinsky's abrupt pounding syncopations and almost exactly like the characteristic rhythms of ' hot ' jazz during the years 1900 to 1905.

(5) Interpretation.

Ives himself has always stressed the experimental nature of his art. He insists that his music is personal and emotional and that it must be recreated at each performance ; the artist must ' live through ' the music as he plays it. Thus Ives allows the utmost latitude to the executant. He is directed to play passages loud or soft according to his immediate feelings, he may add or omit notes at will, often several alternative versions of one passage are given. All this suggests that Ives doesn't regard his music as a consummate art-form, either because he recognizes it as experimental and incomplete or because completeness seems to him an illusory virtue. There is some confusion in Ives's mind in connection with the incompleteness of his art, and discussion of this confusion provides the most convenient approach to an attempted valuation.

## III.

To have discussed the technical traits of Ives's music in this segregated manner has been necessary because he is so revolutionary a composer ; some such preliminary clearing of the ground is unavoidable if critical comment is to be made with any intelligibility. But it should be obvious by now that technique in this limited sense is meaningless as applied to Ives's work. His extraordinary eclectic and voluble style is the outcome of his desire to include everything, all facets of personality and all aspects of reality. To attain this universality has been the aim, avowed or unavowed, of many great composers, Busoni for instance remarking that he wished, in his *Concerto* and other large-scale works, to

include ' everything that presented itself to my imagination.' But he introduced vulgarity and triviality (*cf.* the Tarantella of the *Concerto*) only that they might be seen in reference to other more durable qualities, giving an added richness and sanity, and the notorious eclectic style of which newspaper critics still petulantly complain (What a pity Busoni wrote in so many other composers' manners) is a use of the emotional associations of the style of other composers as legitimate as Eliot's use of quotation.

Now in Ives the whole range of experience is not grasped, consummated, in this way. Musical corollaries of Emersonian uplift (the song *Duty*), of the barbaric yawp of Whitman, of antimacassar evangelicanism and Sunday-school sanctimoniousness (*Immortality*), regional robustness, sentimentality and racy vulgarity (*At the River*), broad music-hall humour (*The Great Man*), and the bustle and dust of ragtime (*Theater Set No. 2*), are poured helter-skelter into the melting pot, and the rag-bag idiom is entirely emotional and undisciplined. The music is wonderfully immediate and vigorous, there is remarkable diversity of life in it, everything which makes up the tragi-comic kaleidoscope that is the life of America. But it is also, I think, rather a superficial kind of life, *so* immediate, so *merely* real, as to be chaotic.

And this kaleidoscopic immediacy and reality is evidence of an extreme moral naïveté, a naïveté which is demonstrably present in the technique. Whenever he is setting words to music Ives's interpretation is comically literal. Thus references to fear or terror will be accompanied by sudden bumpings, clashes and note-clusters (*cf.* the adagio of *Theater Set*), and the movement of the swimmers in the song of that name is indicated by a soaring chromatic vocal line and by a whirling arpeggio accompaniment, not in grammatical harmony, but treated percussively, as ' noise.' The song *West London* (to Arnold's poem) is a particularly curious example, beginning in a contorted dreary jog-trot, with clumsy baffled lines tending to atonality, in the passages describing the distress of the poverty-stricken, and then bursting into ridiculously banal diatonic hymn-book harmonies at the crudely optimistic coda. (The question as to how far such effects may be intended ironically will be discussed shortly). *Like a Sick Eagle*, with its gauchely cluttered harmonies and viscid juxtaposition of sonorities provides a brilliant literal translation into music of a state of physical and mental

fatigue, but the essential naïveté of the trick is revealed in the simple descending chromaticism of the vocal line. The ' sonorous ' imitations of autumnal winds and whirling leaves in *September*, and the vocal descriptions (by means of leaps of major sevenths, quarter tones, shouts, croaks and glissandi) of hail and lightning in *Soliloquy* are open to the same criticism and so, in a rather different way, is the Sunday-school account of Mother's Death in *The Great Man*. The rapid flickerings of Ives's style between the angularities of the atonalists and the unctiousness of the ubiquitous Dykes can always be traced to his concern for the immediately obvious, the surface effect. So that although there is a great bustle of coarse and racy life in his music, it is a vitality that seems almost vicarious, all the flourish, the sentimentality, the fine melodramatic gesture of life but only a little of its real substance. Its reality is deceptive ; it is alive and many-sided as the life of a Fair is alive and many-sided ; but it has something of the Fair's phantasmagoric quality.

Of course, there is an individual note that gives a sort of unity to the apparent chaos, and this individual note is the composer's vigorous robust personality, as a man, not as an artist. You can observe this individuality most clearly in the queer shape of Ives's melodic lines—the unexpected descending leaps in the opening phrases of the song *At Sea*, the coarse and crude humour of the jumping angularities of line in *Walt Whitman*, the more jaunty gaucherie of that charming piece of Broadwayism *Ann Street*—and also in the oddly unresolved harmonic treatment of blatant revivalist or Spiritual tunes like *At the River* (from the 4th Violin Sonata) and in the brusque tough and complicated rhythms of all his characteristic work. Ives's music is the diversified life of the middleman of America seen through the glass of his own personality, it seems all of a piece because it is in one sense Self-Expression, the realization of a powerful easily recognizable temperament. It has a certain unity ; but it has no *order* in the sense that the composer arrives at any organization in, or synthesis of, his experiences. It is essentially undigested experience, the result of over-eating, with the vividly real unreality of a nightmare.

In the foregoing paragraphs I have chosen the examples mainly from *Thirty-Four Songs*, because they are easily accessible, being published by *New Music*, but the preoccupation, which we

have noticed earlier in discussing technical traits of Ives's music, with the aural effects of natural phenomena (brass bands passing each other, sound over water, through a wood, etc.) patently represents the same sort of naïveté on a wider scale—adapted to the orchestra and chorus rather than to the voice, the piano, or a few instruments. And we see that Ives's practice, in his desire to embrace all kinds of experience and all possible means of expression, really cuts to the core of musical æsthetics and opens up speculations as to the nature of the distinction, if there is one, between a noise and a musical tone. (We speak of the music of birds, of the wind, of the stream, etc. Is this merely a metaphorical use of language or do we mean that in these instances the sound is somehow ordered, and if so ordered by what?). Ives's attitude to sound seems to me a healthy one because, at a time when clear thinking was desperately needed, it recognized that distinctions between a noise and a musical sound can only be arbitrary, that the boundaries between the tolerable and the intolerable are elastic, shifting with successive ages in the life of man, that probably the only physical laws which are unanswerable and unalterable are those few primary ones on which melodic construction, in the music of all ages and civilizations, is based, and these laws are, roughly speaking, those implicit in the human voice. But at the same time Ives's attitude is, in its literalness, essentially naïve because it doesn't recognize that although such distinctions may be arbitrary they are none the less necessary, for music is bound to be conventional to a degree and if a composer uses ' noises ' he must be clear in his own mind as to how far he uses them for naturalistic and how far for conventional ends. He may learn from nature how to widen the scope of his musical speech, as the sculptor may learn from nature many of the basic principles of modelling stone ; but his musical speech must remain a speech and not a gibberish.

In the music of Leos Janácek we can examine a traditional stable classical technique invigorated and intensified by emotionally sanctioned explorations into the ' natural ' resources of musical speech ; in the music of Edgar Varèse we can examine an attempt to formulate a language out of the natural phenomena of sound without reference to any traditional idiom—a music which is thus as close to gibberish as a formulated language could well be. Now it is the essence of Ives's documentary importance that he will

have none of such distinctions between the natural and the conventional, and in his denial of the synthesizing activities of the intelligence (it is more than intellect, amounting, really, to emotional maturity), Ives is a typical American product, related to the cult of the cruder aspects of life which emerged in the days of Sherwood Anderson, though he is as a personality much more remarkable and culturally significant. He seems to think that as experience is essentially incomplete and never to be completed the artist has no choice but to present it in fragmentary form. He discards conventions, or uses them all, which is the same thing, and concentrates upon the flux of life which is for him life's only meaning. But the flux of life is, in itself, meaningless ; and the diversity of his art, its complexity, the trivial and nincompoopish beside the solemn and the sad, is its weakness as well as its strength. We cannot be sure how far there is an ironic implication, how far sentimentality and vulgarity are accepted and how far debunked, and this is a more radical defect than if we were certain that there was no ironic implication at all, because it points to a similar uncertainty in the composer's mind. Ives is a *remarkable* melodist but he has created no melody that is in itself remarkably beautiful ; and this is another way of saying that his music is something rather less than music, something that is not quite composition. For this reason it seems to me that his most *musically* successful pieces are those concerned with sensation purely and simply, with practically no indication of an emotional or moral background. Such songs as *The White Gulls*, *Afterglow*, or *Thoreau* convey, through an exquisite original method of fluttering chromaticism and delicate opposed sonorities and timbres (using the piano as a ' sonorous ' instrument by exploiting its harmonic overtones), quiverings of nervous sensation with a success as complete as that of Debussy in his equally adequate but very different technique. These are lovely and successful pieces ; but they are nervous sensation merely, with almost no reference to the emotions human beings feel as they come into contact with each other and with the activities of everyday life. They are not so much art as the material out of which art might be made ; considering them we shall understand how it is that the music Ives wrote during the nineteen-thirties is not noticeably distinct from the music he wrote during the eighteen eighties, except perhaps that it is more expert.

Ives's usefulness for American composers has been, I think, largely negative. He has shown them that each must work out his own salvation, he has suggested means whereby they might do so, but, since his art is so personal, he has not given them a convention which they could as a group accept ; he has provided them with no solidarity. The most cursory survey of American music reveals the complete lack of any centrality, a chaos of conflicting experimentalisms, all of which are as it were summarized in the eclectic diversity of the art of Ives.

## IV.

To attempt to indicate the extent and variety of American creative musical activity in a few paragraphs is indeed a Herculean labour, and I hardly think its usefulness would justify the effort, for as far as I know America has not yet produced any music that is likely to survive the next fifty years. But the diversity is documentarily interesting and there is place for a few notes on its more representative manifestations.

Aaron Copland and Carlos Chavez have the distinction of creating a genuinely indigenous American music. Copland's work is often praised as being a music of Steel Girders. If one looks at the piano *Variations*, which is reputed to be one of his finest compositions, it does seem that a music of Modern Life is rather easy to write. A gawky sequence of notes calling itself a theme is harmonized consistently in major sevenths and minor ninths, galvanized into a nervous hysterical life by complex syncopated rhythmic formations. The music is undoubtedly 'steely' and in a primitive way even exciting, but the convention is pathetically limited. Only in the *Ode*, perhaps, does Copland manifest a slight, sultry and bitter lyrical gift ; harmonically his music is not so much austere as uninteresting (*cf.* his numbing insistence on the 'accompanying' tenth of the average jazz hack).

The most powerful music of Chavez is that which, like the sombre and acrid piano *Sonatina*, is mostly closely related to the ritualistic music of Mexico. This little work contains some genuinely original linear construction, depending on the gradual dynamic development of a persistent linear formula, but in his more consciously American compositions, such as the ridiculous *Blues* and

*Fox* in dissonant linear counterpoint, the studied angularity of the writing, the perpetual leaps of minor ninths and major sevenths, the mechanical perversity of the rhythms, become acutely irritating and I can find nothing in this music but a fetish of aridity. The least silly of the pieces in this style are machine-musics like *Unidad* and ' *36*,' depending on the development of incisive figures in mosaic over a throbbing rhythmic pulse. It is an odd and suggestive fact that Chavez should be associated with the idiotic Pure Music campaign, and yet nothing could be less musical than these compositions of his which deliberately deny the root of all true musical expression—the melody of the human voice.

There are many American composers who ' invent ' specialized idioms. Henry Brant, having decided that nothing more can be done by composing vertically or horizontally, writes harmonically ' oblique ' music, though he grants that *at the present stage of aural development* the unprecendented subtlety of his music is not perceptible to the ear. Ruth Crawford writes heterophonic music in which the various linear strands bear no relation to one another except that of proximity in time-space. An American critic charmingly remarks that a high degree of skill is necessary (a) to avoid any implication of the recognized harmonic and melodic relationships ; (b) to ensure absolute metrical coincidence ; and (c) to make the undertaking worth while. Wallingford Riegger and many others exploit various cerebrally ingenious versions of the Schönbergian tone-row.

The most interesting of the experimental individualists is probably Carl Ruggles whose music looks, in score, as though it might be impressive in a very limited and naïve way. It is volcanically unexpected music in the heroic American ' epic ' pioneer succession. Independently of Schönberg, Ruggles arrived at a species of atonality of which the principle is that no one tone shall be repeated until the tenth progression, but the ' Babylonian ' grandeur of his lines is remote from the perverse tortuosity of Schönberg's, nor does he accept the duodecuple scale but writes rather in a kind of twenty-one tone scale with seven ' white ' notes and a sharp and flat for each. The line is continuous and declamatory, with sweeping curves, accentuated in accordance with the rhythms of the speaking voice.

Many composers like Emerson Whithorne still cling to the old

nineteenth-century European conventions ; others, like Roy Harris and Roger Sessions, strive to modify European conventions in an individualistic way. I do not know enough of Harris's music to speak with confidence but I believe that he lacks sufficient technique to carry through his attempt to give fresh vitality to the Beethovian ' thematic development ' conception of music ; and when I say that he lacks technique I mean that he lacks conviction, is muddle-headed and ' moved ' too violently in no particular direction. Sessions on the other hand is technically very accomplished, a man of impeccable taste and considerable intelligence who knows precisely what he wants to do but has, ultimately, little creative zest of a positive order. Finally, one might mention the inevitable fact that the American musical scene teems with toughly sentimental Cummingsian counterparts of the noodles of the twentieth-century Parisian salon ; it can but induce a kind of inert desperation to realize that the only possible compromise between the poker-faced solemnity of the New Music school and the trite lachrymosity of the Hollywooden hack of Tin-Pan Alley seems to be represented by the private facetiousness of eupeptically gay composers like Virgil Thomson, Marc Blitzenstein, and Nicholas Slominsky.

If the present of American music is so little encouraging, what is to be said of the future? Can one regard it hopefully when a man such as Ives, of immense force of character and of undeniable talent, fails to produce a single authentic composition? Well, there is one consideration that may give us pause, though it offers no definite contribution to the problem either way, and this is that Ives has at least given the American composer a clean slate to start with. The European composer is beset with the foetid vegetation of so many dead ideals and rotten beliefs that the rank breath of it must needs cloud his eyes and tingle his nostrils. On the other hand the European composer, if he is extremely honest and clairvoyantly sensitive, may yet find a whiff of life in the midst of putrefaction, whereas the American composer is unanswerably reduced to ' constructing ' something positive out of ' air which is thoroughly small and dry.' The glitter of Mr. Copland's Steel Girders will not magnificently dazzle any but the already desperate-hearted ; but I suppose one must admit that there's nothing one can do if one doesn't continue briskly to hammer in the rivets.

W. H. MELLERS.

# LESLIE STEPHEN: CAMBRIDGE CRITIC

THE reputation of Leslie Stephen as literary critic seems to have been at its lowest ebb when Mr. Desmond MacCarthy in his lecture on *Leslie Stephen* (being the Leslie Stephen lecture for 1937) nailed down the coffin. No contrary demonstration was provoked among the audience or the Press. However, some of us may feel that the last word has not yet been said, on our side, and on the other—the corpse's—that these bones can still live. Those of us who can remember the barren state of English literary criticism before *The Sacred Wood* reached the common reader and before *The Problem of Style* and *Principles of Literary Criticism* appeared remember also their debt to Leslie Stephen: for after Johnson, Coleridge and Arnold who was there who was any help? [Certainly not Pater or Symons or Saintsbury or . . . ] We were grateful to Leslie Stephen not so much for what he wrote—though that was considerable—as for what he stood for, implied and pointed to. He seemed to us to be in the direct line of the best tradition of our literary criticism, to exemplify the principle virtues of a literary critic, and to exhibit a tone, a discipline and an attitude that were desirable models to form oneself on. This, to us, would have seemed the obvious starting-point for any contemporary littérateur speaking on that subject. Mr. MacCarthy, however, was entirely apologetic and deprecatory. This—he said, as it were—is what Leslie Stephen was, these were his scraps of abilities (and a poor showing they make, I grant you), of course he had none of the essential qualifications for a literary critic (we know what they are) and he had all these disabilities, but still there it is and I've done my duty by him.

I think it owing to Leslie Stephen to scrutinize Mr. MacCarthy's critical values and to state, in greater detail than I have done above, what Leslie Stephen stands for and what his criticism consisted of. For apart from Mr. MacCarthy's unfortunate testimonial and the chatty informal *Life and Letters* by Maitland,

there is nothing ; except Stephen's own *Some Early Impressions*, which even in Cambridge no one seems to read. On the other hand, everyone has read *To the Lighthouse*, and the portrait-piece of Mr. Ramsay by Leslie Stephen's gifted daughter elicited immediate recognition from the oldest generation. Yes, that's Leslie Stephen, the word went round ; and that brilliant study in the Lytton Strachey manner of a slightly ludicrous, slightly bogus, Victorian philosopher somehow served to discredit Leslie Stephen's literary work. But it is obvious to any student of it that that work could not have been produced by Mr. Ramsay. However, Stephen seems fated to be known only as the original editor of the D.N.B.

Mr. MacCarthy starts by informing us that Leslie Stephen is ' the least æsthetic of noteworthy critics '—meaning, it appears, that Stephen was thereby at a disadvantage. His unfavourable criticism of Sterne, for instance, is due to his inability to enjoy what Mr. MacCarthy called Sterne's ' elegant ambiguity ' and he does not appreciate that ' Sterne's attitude towards all emotions was playful.' Actually Stephen's last word on Sterne was this: ' Sterne has been called the English Rabelais . . . We know that, on clearing away the vast masses of buffoonery and ribaldry under which Rabelais was forced, or chose, to hide himself we come to the profound thinker and powerful satirist. Sterne represents a comparatively shallow vein of thought . . . He is too systematic a trifler to be reckoned with any plausibility amongst the spiritual leaders of any intellectual movement.' Mr. MacCarthy does not like this kind of criticism, and he consistently but not I think deliberately misrepresents it ; you suspect that he finds it uncongenial because it represents a threat to his own existence as a critic. He notes with discomfort Stephen's seriousness, his refusal to compromise or to scale down his standards, and he complains that Stephen's strong sense of character affected his discussion of an author's work. That is, Mr. MacCarthy deplores a moral sense in the critic. What he demands instead is easily discovered: ' Stephen was deficient in the power of transmitting the emotions he had derived himself from literature ; he seldom, if ever, attempted to record a thrill.' ' As a practising critic he limited hemself as far as he could to that aspect of his subject about which it was possible to argue.' Criticism, we are further told, is the adventures of the soul

among masterpieces, and the soul of Cambridge, he suggests, had no qualifications for embarking on such adventures ' in a region where reason is at a disadvantage compared with intuition.'

Mr. MacCarthy is placing not Leslie Stephen but himself (he might be a vulgarized echo of Arthur Symons). Delivered at Cambridge in 1937 his can only be described as an insolent performance. For if the humanistic side of Cambridge studies has any justification for existing it is in standing in the eyes of the great world—as it does—for a critical position descended from Leslie Stephen's and antagonistic to Mr. MacCarthy. Some part at least of Mr. MacCarthy's audience must not have been affected as he expected by his recital of Stephen's limitations or failings—that Stephen seemed to think that on the whole books ought not to be written unless they are first-rate of their kind, that mediocrity in poetry is unforgivable, that his studies ' might seem grudging, owing to the number of reservations they contain, until the reader has grasped that praise from Leslie Stephen, which he always strove to make precise, meant a very great deal.' And so on. Actually, I suppose the more intelligent section of Mr. MacCarthy's audience held these qualities, this outlook, that mode of expression, to be indispensable to the practice of literary criticism. ' I often think that the value of second-rate literature is not small, but simply zero ' Stephen wrote. He was not a Sunday reviewer, we perceive. And unless you are one, or a minor poet, you can hardly be devoted to literature without having reached the same conclusions as Leslie Stephen independently. Again Mr. MacCarthy cannot see the point of Stephen's painstaking examination of Defoe's minor novels (though his essay has the merit of destroying in anticipation the Woolf-Forster claim that Defoe is a literary *artist*) and his similar pieces of critical analysis ; he opines that criticisms of this kind (with which ' Leslie Stephen's critical essays are crammed '), while they may ' increase our interest when we think over an author's works,' yet ' Of course, they do not help us to decide whether the fiction in question is good or bad.' When it comes to judgment, he says, ' the test which Leslie Stephen applied was the relation of a work to life, the extent to which it ministered, in one way or another, to all human good.' This is not the best way of explaining Stephen's critical values, but we can gather the force of Mr. MacCarthy's objections. Those of us who do not choose

to linger in the æsthetic vacuum of the 'nineties can afford the courage of asserting that we agree with Leslie Stephen and not Mr. MacCarthy. Mr. MacCarthy's critical position is revealed as the last heritage of the 'nineties (not the Cambridge 'nineties). It is a position which we might well have supposed not merely outmoded but abolished for ever, though I suppose its last recognizable sign of life was as recent as Mr. Clive Bell's theory of Significant Form.

Let us recapitulate the grounds of dispute between Mr. MacCarthy and Leslie Stephen. Stephen, misguided man, thought the critic should confine himself to what is discussible about a work of art instead of recording his thrill at experiencing it: the youngest hand will have the answer ready that it is the critic's business to advance the profitable discussion of literature, substitute-creation ('transmitting the emotions derived from literature') being indefensible egotism. His detailed analyses of writings, focussing on the writer's idiom and technical devices, do not help us to decide whether the work is good or bad, says Mr. MacCarthy; we on the contrary who believe that literary criticism can be demonstrated and so argued about find Stephen's procedure—starting from the surface and working inwards to radical criticism—obviously right and convincing. We believe with Stephen that literary criticism is not a mystic rapture but a process of the intelligence. No doubt the environment of Clerk Maxwell and Henry Sidgwick was peculiarly favourable to the development of such an attitude to literature, but we recollect that Arnold and Coleridge also practised this method when they were most effectual. His feeling that the character of an author was a factor in his art to be reckoned with was, we are assured, a demerit in a critic, it interfered with his judgment of a piece of literature. We reply that Stephen had evidently a finer critical sense than Bloomsbury; if we mean by art something more profound than an 'æsthetic' theory can explain we have to agree with Henry James, that in the last event the value of a work of art depends on the quality of the writer's make-up. Art is not amoral and everything is not as valuable as everything else. Stephen did not apply a moral touch-stone naïvely. In practice the question at issue is, can we or can we not diagnose Sterne's limitations and George Eliot's only partial success as artists in terms of these writers' make-up? Stephen

thought he could and we think he did. The position we share with Leslie Stephen has been admirably stated by Mr. L. H. Myers in the Preface to *The Root and the Flower*, where he says that ' Proust, for instance, by treating all sorts of sensibility as equal in importance, and all manifestations of character as standing on the same plane of significance, adds nothing to his achievement, but only draws attention to himself as aiming at the exaltation of a rather petty form of æstheticism. For my part, I believe that a man serves himself better by showing a respect for such moral taste as he may possess.' Unless we adopt this position, says Mr. Myers, we ' are likely to be satisfied with art that is petty.' Stephen had no use for art that is petty ; Mr. MacCarthy wants to be allowed to rebuke him for describing Sterne as ' a systematic trifler ' representing ' a shallow vein.' Of course the academic attitude to literature is much the same as Mr. MacCarthy's. ' It appears that you prefer some authors to others, Mr. Graves ' is the classic rebuke of authority to criticism. Stephen was not academic—it is only one of his virtues but it is the fundamental one for a critic—he was not conventional, timid or respectable in his findings. ' It is tempting to try to clear away some of the stupendous rubbish-heaps of eulogy which accumulate over the great men when admiration has become obligatory on pain of literary renunciation ' he wrote. And again on Johnson's criticism of Milton :

> ' His independent judgments are interesting even when erroneous. His unlucky assault upon *Lycidas* is generally dismissed with a pitying shrug of the shoulders . . . Of course every tyro in criticism has his answer ready . . . The same writer who will tell us all this, and doubtless with perfect truth, would probably have adopted Pope or Johnson's theory with equal confidence if he had lived in the last century. *Lycidas* repelled Johnson by incongruities which, from his point of view, were certainly offensive. Most modern readers, I will venture to suggest, feel the same annoyances, though they have not the courage to avow them freely . . . Every critic is in effect criticizing himself as well as his author ; and I confess that to my mind an obviously sincere record of impressions, however onesided they may be, is infinitely refreshing, as revealing at least the honesty of the writer. The ordinary run of criticism

generally implies nothing but the extreme desire of the author to show that he is open to the very last new literary fashion . . . If Johnson's blunder in this case implied sheer stupidity, one can only say that honest stupidity is a much better thing than clever insincerity or fluent repetition of second-hand dogmas . . . He had the rare courage—for, even then, Milton was one of the tabooed poets—to say what he thought as forcibly as he could say it ; and he has suffered the natural punishment of plain speaking.'

Mr. MacCarthy evidently thinks that the Cambridge ethos, which everyone including Stephen agrees was the decisive influence in shaping his character, was very inferior intellectually to old Bloomsbury. What sort of environment was it in fact? The best account of it is in *Some Early Impressions* (Hogarth Press), where Stephen himself records his debt. Stephen was born in 1832. His family was what he called ' the second generation from the Clapham Sect ' (it is interesting to note that Macaulay's was the first generation from it and Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell's the third). Stephen did not react against the Clapham inheritance. His admiration for ' the essential Puritan ' was derived from his early impressions. He naturally found the Evangelical leaning of Cambridge in 1850 congenial. ' Cambridge has for the last three centuries inclined to the less romantic side of things . . . We could boast of no Newman, nor of men who, like Froude and Pattison, submitted for a time to the fascination of his genius and only broke from it with a wrench which permanently affected his mental equilibrium. " I have never known a Cambridge man," as a reverent disciple of the prophet said to me, " who could appreciate Newman." Our version of the remark was slightly different. We held that our common sense enabled us to appreciate him only too thoroughly by the dry light of reason and to resist the illusions of romantic sentiment.' It was one of the advantages of Cambridge, he felt, that there was no such spiritual leader as Carlyle or Newman in the place. His mind was formed first by his mathematical tutor Isaac Todhunter, whose character impressed him as much as his attainments, by the great Whewell (who had no personal charm, and whose character, intellect and influence were markedly opposite to those of Jowett, for whom Stephen felt great

distaste) and finally by the pervading influence of John Stuart Mill. ' Pure, passionless reason ' was embodied in his works—which was all his disciples knew of him at the time. Stephen speaks of ' that shrewd, hard-headed, North-country type which was so conspicuous at Cambridge ' and notes ' our favourite antipathy was the '' imposter ''—that is, the man given to allowing his feelings to override his common sense.' At Cambridge he found a conspicuous absence of interest in the struggle of Church parties then proceeding (' We left such matters to Oxford '), ' the religion of all sensible men ' being generally the wear. This Stephen after some years as a don and tutor found dropping away from him painlessly, and he became and remained an agnostic. What Cambridge had to offer him is most clearly seen if we consider the contrasting experience of Mark Pattison, a natural Cantab as it were, who, as Stephen noted, ' fretting under the oppressive spirit of the old Oxford atmosphere ' and feeling that Newman represented mere obscurantism, wore himself out in his efforts at educational reform in the university, thwarted by the insufferable Jowett. He left Cambridge without loss of esteem on either side and entered journalism, the higher journalism that was then available to offer a career to talent without degradation. ' I joined the great army of literature because I was forced into the ranks,' he wrote in after life, ' but also with no little pride in my being accepted as a recruit.' The *Saturday Review* succeeded Cambridge and stamped him afresh. He notes that turning over the files many years afterwards to look for his own contributions, he was startled to discover that he could rarely distinguish them by internal evidence. It seems to have been a congenial extension of the Cambridge ethos; he speaks of the 'strong realistic common sense of the Johnson variety' that was practised. The last factor in shaping him as a critic seems to have been the D.N.B., whose editorship he accepted in 1882. There he ' learnt to think that the whole art of writing consists in making one word suffice where other ordinary men use two.' It also assisted him to perfect his dry, unobtrusive irony thanks to which the Dictionary is, as Maitland said, ' strewn with man-traps.' That impersonal but caustic wit, expressing an outlook characteristically devoid of easy enthusiasm, is most evident in the George Eliot volume he contributed to the English Men of Letters series (of the others—Hobbes, Pope, Johnson and Swift—the two last

are admirable). It is a decidedly unsympathetic study though admirers of George Eliot find to their annoyance that he has said practically all in her favour that there is to say; his critical appraisal of her weaknesses remains an uncomfortable obstacle which they cannot afford to neglect and which is not easily dealt with.

His belief in reason (as opposed to 'intuition') deplored by Mr. MacCarthy did not lead to crass blindness. He was not ignorant of the fact that a work of art has its own internal logic; but he did not consider that this exempted the author or poet from intellectual scrutiny. He expected a poet who deployed philosophic views to have sound ones, and he realized, in spite of his great 'intuitive' admiration for Wordsworth, that Wordsworth's were not always sound. For Shelley's intellectual lights he had the greatest disrespect, and was able to make a corresponding case against Shelley's poetry—he protests to J. A. Symonds that he cannot agree with his praise of Shelley in the Men of Letters volume, there is 'a certain hollowness' about the Prometheus, an 'insubstantial mist' in much of Shelley's most admired poems. His use of 'reason' is in the Johnson tradition. Since it led him to explode Lamb's sophistical defence of Restoration Comedy and Hazlitt's of Wycherley, it was evidently a useful critical technique. His cautious examination of what a writer has to offer will seem to many of us, in spite of Mr. MacCarthy, worth more than a cartload of records of thrills. Do we or do we not find the following kind of criticism more helpful than transmission of the emotions derived from literature?:

> 'There are parasitical writers who, in the old phrase, have "formed their style" by the imitation of accepted models, and who have, therefore, possessed it only by right of appropriation. Boswell has a discussion as to the writers who may have served Johnson in this capacity. But in fact, Johnson, like all other men of strong idiosyncrasy, formed his style as he formed his legs . . . Johnsonese was, as far as we can judge, a genuine product. Macaulay says that it is more offensive than the mannerisms of Milton or Burke, because it is a mannerism adopted on principle and sustained by constant effort. Facts do not confirm this theory. Milton's prose style seems to be the result of a

conscious effort to run English into classical moulds. Burke's mannerism does not appear in his early writings, and we can trace its development from the imitation of Bolingbroke to the last declamation against the Revolution. But Johnson seems to have written Johnsonese from his cradle.'

' What Swift has really done [in *Gulliver*] is to provide for the man who despises his species a number of exceedingly effective symbols for the utterance of his contempt.'

His style was no doubt precipitated by the conditions of working as journalist, editor and biographer, but it is a genuine expression of personality and an effective weapon. Aspects of it were registered in the contemporary mots: 'No flowers by request' and 'Stephen's ink was never watery' (or purple, it might have been added). He had the right to come down on Arnold for his rhetoric about the dreaming spires and to object to his mannerisms. Stephen was the type of the critic who makes no parade of personality, has no studied attitudes, whose manner consists of an absence of manner but is felt as the presence of a mature personality. He himself described his style modestly as ' short-winded and provokingly argumentative,' and says that whereas X ' can keep up a flow of eloquence ' he himself cannot keep on the rhetorical level because he ' must always have some tangible remark to make.' Unlike his contemporaries we cannot consider this in any way unfortunate. His habitual tone and style are represented by this from the essay on Jowett: ' To a distinct view of the importance of some solution he seems to have joined the profound conviction that no conceivable solution would hold water. " He stood," says one of his pupils, in a rather different sense, " at the parting of many ways," and he wrote, one must add, "No thoroughfare" upon them all.' As a critic he stood for outspoken criticism all round ; ' I like his [Huxley's] pugnacity—a quality I always admire. The more hard-hitting goes on in the world, the better I am pleased—meaning always hard-hitting in the spiritual sense.' His critical credo is constantly implied in the essays *Hours in a Library* (three volumes), *Studies of a Biographer* (four volumes) and the fragmentary *English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*. It corresponds generally to the position that we hold to-day.

'After all, though criticism cannot boast of being a science, it ought to aim at something like a scientific basis, or at least to proceed in a scientific spirit. The critic, therefore, before abandoning himself to the oratorical impulse, should endeavour to classify the phenomena with which he is dealing as calmly as if he were ticketing a fossil in a museum. The most glowing eulogy, the most bitter denunciation, have their proper place; but they belong to the art of persuasion, and form no part of scientific method . . . Our faith in an author must, in the first instance, be the product of instinctive sympathy, instead of deliberate reason. But when we are seeking to justify our emotions, we must endeavour to get for the time into the position of an independent spectator, applying with rigid impartiality such methods as are best calculated to free us from the influence of personal bias.'

'Coleridge's specific merit was not, I think, that he laid down any scientific theory. He was something almost unique in this as in his poetry, first because his criticism was the criticism of a man who combined the first simple impulse of admiration with the power of explaining why he admired; and secondly, and as a result, because he placed himself at the right point of view; because, to put it briefly, he was the first great writer who criticized poetry as poetry, and not as science.'

'Nothing is easier than to put the proper label on a poet—to call him "romantic" or "classical," and so forth; and then if he has a predecessor of like principles, to explain him by the likeness, and if he represents a change of principles, to make the change explain itself by calling it a reaction. The method is delightfully simple, and I can use the words as easily as my neighbours. The only thing I find difficult is to look wise when I use them, or to fancy that I give an explanation because I have adopted a classification.'

'The phrase "criticism of life" gave great offence, and was much ridiculed by some writers, who were apparently unable to distinguish between an epigram and a philosophical dogma. To them indeed, Arnold's whole position was naturally abhorrent. For it is not uncommon now to hear denunciations of all attempts to connect art with morality and philosophy. It is wicked, we are told, for a poet, or a novelist, or a painter, to take any

moral consideration into account ; and therefore to talk of poetry as destined to do for us much that philosophy and religion used to do is, of course, manifestly absurd. I will not argue the point at length . . . Meanwhile it is my belief that nobody is the better in any department of life or literature for being a fool or a brute: and least of all in poetry. I cannot think that a man is disqualified for poetry either by thinking more deeply than others or by having a keener perception of (I hope I may join the two words) moral beauty . . . When Arnold called poetry a criticism of life, he only meant to express what seems to me an undeniable truth.'

'Critics in an earlier day conceived their function to be judicial. They were administering a fixed code of laws applicable in all times and places . . . There are undoubtedly some principles of universal application ; and the old critics often expounded them with admirable common-sense and force. But like general tenets of morality, they are apt to be commonplaces, whose specific application requires knowledge of concrete facts . . . Criticism must become thoroughly inductive . . . Briefly, in talking of literary changes, I shall have, first, to take note of the main intellectual characteristics of the period ; and secondly, what changes took place in the audience to which men of letters addressed themselves, and how the gradual extension of the reading class affected the development of the literature addressed to them.'

I hope I have made it plain not only what Leslie Stephen's strength as a literary critic was, but why I have chosen to describe him as a Cambridge critic. His is not (unfortunately) the invariable kind of criticism practised at Cambridge or by Cambridge products, but it is what the world of journalism and *belles-lettres* means when it refers with respect or malice to 'Cambridge Criticism.' His style, his tone, his mental attributes, his outlook are what are considered the most admirable, or objectionable, or at any rate, whatever your opinion of it, the most characteristic features of the Cambridge school. Cambridge has not by any means produced only Leslie Stephens ; it is sufficient to name Rupert Brooke and Housman as evidence that dug-outs exist as refuges from the prevailing wind, that east wind which Elton, I think, says might

have done Pater so much good if he had been placed in the other university. In contemporary Cambridge where one section still holds literary criticism to be a charming parasite and sends its soul, with Mr. MacCarthy's approval, adventuring among masterpieces, while another holds semasiology to have superseded literary criticism along with philosophy and the rest—it is high time for those who look back with respect to Leslie Stephen as the exemplar of a sound position and a profitable practice to put it on record why they honour his memory.

Q. D. Leavis.

# GIOVANNI PAPINI AND ITALIAN LITERATURE[1]

THE main characteristic of all Signor Papini's work is a conviction of his own originality. His career has been distinguished by numerous vicissitudes and spectacular conversions, recorded in a series of self-revelations ranging from *Un Uomo Finito* (1912) to *La Storia di Cristo* (1920). The titles seem to imply a contrast between scepticism and belief, but the most significant thing about them is the identity of character, vivid, egoistic, and incurably polemic, which they reveal. The English reader, to whom much in Papini's character must seem incomprehensible, needs to remember a variety of circumstances. When he picks up a history of literature dedicated to ' Benito Mussolini amico della poesia e dei poeti,' he should reflect that literature in Italy has been for six hundred years at once the repository and the vanguard of a national consciousness which has remained until recently without practical political fulfilment. And when he is disturbed by Papini's self-assertiveness he needs to remember that the retarded achievement of national unity in Italy coincided with a period of abject spiritual poverty and coarse materialism from which all Italian

[1] *Storia Della Letteratura, Italiana,* Vol. I, by Giovanni Papini (Vallecchi, 1937).

literature, from Pascoli and D'Annunzio downwards, has been trying with varying success to escape. So when Papini insists in his preface that the value of his book lies in its being written, not by a critic but by a ' creative writer,' his ' originality,' with all its excesses, is a genuine effort to escape from the void created by debased spiritual values ; and his insistence upon the moral and civil function of literature implies awareness of an historic gap between political realities and a genuine national consciousness which has suddenly found itself called upon, in an age of decaying traditions and spiritual uncertainty, to proceed beyond intellectual formulation and literary expression to practical action. It is Papini's aim to bring the great tradition of Italian literature into contact with the life of the nation ; it is a pity, therefore, that marked critical deficiencies should cause this tradition to be seriously impoverished at his hands.

Papini's ideas are a strange mixture of sense and perversity. He is fully justified in believing that a great literature should provide ' vital nutrimento ' ; but he is impatient of the discipline which the critical intelligence should bring to personal intuition. Francesco de Sanctis, the author of the most notable history of Italian literature, is dismissed in these terms: ' Lo stesso De Sanctis . . . era un critico più ardito e caldo dei soliti ma pur sempre un critico, cioè discorritore filosofante assai più che artista.' The implied criticism, supported by apt quotations from Carducci and D'Annunzio, contains a germ of truth ; but Papini never seems to realize that the shortcomings of De Sanctis are not due to his being too ' critical,' but rather to his being in certain cases not critical enough. In short, a critic is *not,* as Papini assumes, a ' discorritore filosofante.' De Sanctis had remarkable critical gifts in an age notably deficient in them ; had he possessed even more fully the capacity to eliminate certain prejudices dictated by his outlook and environment, these gifts would have been greater still.

Papini's intuitions are much more obviously insecure. He has a good deal of the flamboyant facility and shallow posturing of the self-conscious convert. His robustly personal and Florentine idiom can be stimulating, but is often a rather graceless display of personal exhibitionism ; and it is often coupled with an extraordinary degree of incomprehension. He tells us that the *Vita Nuova* is like the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, simply

because both are ' a kind of guide to the progressive perfection of the soul,' and because both ' meditate a passion.' He slips easily into rhetorical profundities about ' the divinity of poetry,' and reaches something like the height of vulgarity in describing the early life of Catherine of Siena: ' Ci sarebbe materia per far di Caterina una " donna fatale," che innamora di sè gli uomini fino al punto di spingerli a volontaria morte.'

These incidental failings suggest the insufficiency of Papini's approach. His book is inadequate, partly because it shows no sense of literature as a continuous process, and partly because the moral judgments which are his main concern are not safeguarded from irrelevance by disinterested critical analysis. These defects are apparent in his treatment of Boccaccio where a series of interesting intuitions fails to produce a balanced judgment. The case of Boccaccio is worth considering in detail as an illustration of Signor Papini's methods. He revolts at once, and rightly, against the unhistorical conception of Boccaccio as a precursor of full-blown humanism, as an asserter of ' the values of life ' against mediæval asceticism. For Papini, the *Decameron* expresses a complete collapse of moral standards, and the plague round which the whole book is built up becomes a heaven-sent opportunity for the assertion of anarchy proceeding from the collapse of law: ' La peste . . . è anche un avvenimento (quasi, si direbbe, provvidenziale) destinato ad allentare i vincoli delle leggi, dei costumi, delle convenienze, cioè ad istaurare un regime di libertà, propizio allo sfogo degli istinti.'

This picture of Boccaccio is supported by an arbitrary selection of the elements in his work which happen to coincide with Papini's own interests ; one might call it, in fact, a projection into the fourteenth century of the ' uomo finito.' An unprejudiced reading of the *Decameron* does not support this simple view. Not only is Boccaccio's treatment of avarice and religious abuses related to a long mediæval tradition, which is familiar throughout European literature and so cannot be safely ignored, but (what is even more important) Papini's account cannot explain why the *Decameron* is a great work. He shows himself dimly aware of this when he practically renounces any attempt to give a coherent account of his subject and concludes that ' Il Boccaccio fu un grande scrittore ma non un grande spirito.' The phrase ' un grande spirito ' is

perhaps a little less loose in Italian than its translation into English would suggest ; but it is astonishing that a critic who insists upon the seriousness and moral content of literature should be ready to accept this facile division between ' literary ' and ' moral ' qualities. Had Signor Papini been prepared to examine Boccaccio's qualities as ' un grande scrittore ' he would have produced a figure less anarchical and less ' modern ' than the creature of his intuition, but with a more reasonable foundation for his greatness, and more closely connected with the development of Italian literature.

Papini himself notes that Boccaccio's prose is a compound, in varying proportions, of two elements—a vivid, idiomatic Florentine, and a ' literary ' prose elaborately modelled on Latin syntax ; this fact, once its importance is fully appreciated, enables one not only to place Boccaccio in the line of Italian literary development, but also to define the qualities and deficiencies of his sensibility. Boccaccio's prose is the expression, vigorous and assertive, of the prosperous middle-class life of the Italian cities, an expression whose confident vivacity is the reflection of acute intelligence and personal initiative. Boccaccio was himself the son of a merchant connected by marriage with a noble French family. One has only to compare his prose with Dante's, on the one hand, and with that of the mediæval chronicles and *novelle* on the other, to see that his work represents something new in Italian literature. Dante, in the prose of the *Vita Nuova* and the *Convivio*, is engaged in creating, among other things, an instrument for the expression of his thought ; one can feel the writer, intensely aware of the originality of this attempt, exploring the resources of Latin vocabulary and syntax to make the undeveloped vernacular suitable for conveying the complexities of exact thought. The writer is engaged in a struggle, not only with his own thought, but with the available means of expression. This may be shown by quoting almost anywhere from the *Convivio*:

> ' E io adunque, che non seggio a la beata mensa, ma, fuggito de la pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade, e conosco la misera vita di quelli che dietro m'ho lasciati, per la dolcezza ch'io sento in quello che a poco a poco ricolgo, misericordievolmente mosso, non me dimenticando, per li miseri alcuna cosa ho riservata, la quale a

li occhi loro, già è più tempo, ho dimostrata ; e in ciò li ho fatti maggiormente vogliosi.' (*Convivio*, I, i, 10).

No detailed analysis is needed to show how Dante is struggling here to bring Latin syntactical forms to the service of vernacular prose. It takes some effort to pick out the central phrase: ' E io adunque . . . per li miseri alcuna cosa ho riservata,' and to disentangle the series of interwoven clauses which have been forced, sometimes with a distinct strain, into the compressed structure of the sentence. Only in the unique poetry of the *Paradiso* will a fusion of Latin and vernacular elements be successfully accomplished by the sheer compelling power of Dante's strongest emotions ; and then the achievement, like the poem itself, will be unique and inimitable. Dante's prose is only a necessary by-product of his genius ; modern Italian prose really derives from another outlook, which produced Boccaccio.

In Boccaccio's best writing, the vernacular has acquired self-confidence and fluidity, no longer in the expression of abstract thought, but in the representation of concrete reality. The best prose of the *Decameron* retains the immediate and vigorous phrasing of the *novelle* and the Florentine chronicles, but adds to them the supple continuity of a closely-knit syntax ; in other words, it has attained maturity and a consciousness of its own gifts. The mediæval *leggende* have a dramatic sense of their own, but their expression is always direct and unelaborated. Describing Cæsar in a storm at sea, one such *leggenda* simply sets a number of the circumstances of his voyage side by side and leaves them to make their own effect: ' . . . la notte era scura, la tempesta era forte, la vela era rotta, lo nocchiero era smarrito.'[1] The references in these stories are almost always direct and popular ; Antony is ' duca e maniscalco dell'oste di Cesare,' and Cæsar describes him as ' un malvagio uomo.' The world for which Boccaccio wrote retained this sense of vividness and directness of reference ; but, having come into economic prosperity and a consciousness of its own dignity, it demanded also the refinements of culture. It required a prose based on the vernacular but not without distinction, direct but not lacking

[1]From a collection of *leggende* entitled: *Fatti di Cesare*, dating probably from about 1300.

in a sophistication of its own ; and this is the prose, sometimes wonderfully vivid and precise, sometimes pretentious and overloaded when the literary inspiration outdistanced the feeling for directness, which Boccaccio provided.

One might give many instances of the precision and actuality with which Boccaccio visualizes his characters ; here are two noted by Papini :

> ' Isabetta . . . giovane ancora di ventotto in trenta anni, fresca e bella e ritondetta, che pareva una mela casolana.'
>
> (*Decameron*, III, 4).
>
> ' Biondello, piccoletto della persona, leggiadro molto e più pulito che una mosca, con sua cuffia in capo con una zazzerina bionda . . . ' (IX, 8).

Such prose is completely secure ; the popular reference, apparent in the choice of the comparisons (' più pulito che una mosca,' ' che pareva una mela casolana ') and in the fresh use of the diminutives (' ritond*etta*,' ' piccol*etto* '), is at the service of a lucid intelligence and a fully conscious purpose. Signor Papini's uncritical approach blinds him to the full significance of this achievement. Commenting on Isabetta, he says that she ' was made for the desire,' and this is perfectly true ; but the comment implies, given Papini's leanings, a moral sensationalism which is quite out of place here, nor is there anything immoral about a picture at once so lucid and so vivacious. Boccaccio's prose has a profound significance in the development of Italian literature. The new society, reflected in a writer of the first order, has become aware of the direction of its talents. Dante's speculative interests, which presuppose the mediæval sense of the continuity between metaphysics and practical action, lie outside its scope ; the intellectual universality of the middle ages has been replaced by the intelligence and vivacity of individual enterprise.

These qualities can be seen almost anywhere in the *Decameron*. One might instance the story of Calindrino (VIII, 3) who was deceived by his more acute neighbours into searching for a certain dark stone which, as he was told, would bring him prosperity. The choice of subject is typical : Boccaccio invariably delights in the exposure of simplicity (especially when associated with greed) by men of quick wit and sharp intelligence. Bruno and Buffalmacco,

the two conspirators, are presented as ' uomini sollazzevoli molto, ma per altro *avveduti* e sagaci,' and Maso del Saggio is ' un giovane di maravigliosa piacevolezza, in ciascuna cosa che far voleva, *astuto* e avvenevole.' They take pleasure in telling the simple Calandrino about ' Berlinzone, terra de' Baschi,' and in playing up to his ignorance of geography by assuring him that this country is ' further than Abruzzi.' This delight in the resourcefulness of the intelligence is the product of the shrewd and self-reliant merchant classes exercising their newly-acquired literary consciousness ; it is also the first mature expression of Italian prose.

There is, however, another aspect to Boccaccio's work. When we turn to the ornate Latinized periods with which he elaborated his unbelievable tales of moral edification (Papini rightly observes that Boccaccio's representations of virtue are either ' incredible or border on stupidity ') we are aware not so much of an anarchic writer as of one whose magnificent sensual and linguistic talent was not crowned with an adequate moral consciousness. Boccaccio's inspiration, at such moments, becomes merely ' literary ' ; his very virtuosity, in the absence of his greater qualities, testifies to lack of interest. If we wish to see how far Boccaccio, when he attempted to give his work a moral content, could go in following a dead convention, we have only to turn to the pastoral *Ameto*. Heavy, artificial prose, with long and unvaried set-pieces of description (the very epithets used to describe the various nymphs—' *candide* guancie,' ' bocca *vermiglia*,' ' *candida* gola,' ' *diritto* collo '—recur again and again) prepare us for an unpleasing mixture of conventionalized immorality and feeble echoes of Dante's *terza rima*. Prose and poetry both tell the same story. His ' moral ' allegorical prose is related to the living parts of the *Decameron* as his spurious *terza rima* is related to the fresh and vigorous verse of the *Ninfale Fiesolano*. On the one hand we have the banalities expressed by the Trinity at the end of the *Ameto*, when Boccaccio clearly has the *Paradiso* in mind:

> ' Io son luce del cielo unica e trina,
> Principio e fine di ciascuna cosa,
> Del qual men fu, nè fia nulla vicina.
> E sì son vera luce e graziosa,
> Che chi mi segue non andrà giammai
> Errando in parte trista, o tenebrosa.'

Against this, we must set the *Ninfale*, whose easy and supple rhythms correspond so perfectly to a graceful poetic idiom:

> ' E tu sola fanciulla bionda e bella,
> Morbida, bianca, angelica, e vezzosa,
> Con leggiadro atto e benigna favella,
> Fresca e giuliva più che bianca rosa,
> E splendente più di ogni altra stella
> Sei che mi piace più che altra cosa . . . '
>
> (Pt. III, v. 69).

This verse is itself founded on a poetic convention, which is felt in ' leggiadro atto,' ' benigna favella,' in ' giuliva ' and ' bianca rosa,' and in the comparison to the star. But, in the first place, the convention, which derives from the poetry of the ' stil nuovo,' reflects a refinement of poetic language and mirrors a genuine sensibility ; and, secondly, Boccaccio shows by the effective ' conversational ' touch in the last line (' Sei che mi piace più che altra cosa ') that it is a convention still in touch with living speech and so with his real interests. And this can never be said for Boccaccio's ' moralizing ' writings.

Once more, this judgment has historical and social implications. Boccaccio's age, for all the confidence with which it expressed itself in its prose, was peculiarly an age of uncertainty. The final decay of the ideal of the mediæval Empire and the removal of the Papacy to Avignon: the strange mixture of incipient national feeling, of antiquarian nostalgia, and of visionary religion, apparent in the career of Cola di Rienzo: the development of capitalist enterprise side by side with the traditional attitude to usury—all these things point to fundamental changes, as yet scarcely understood, in the outlook of society. This uncertainty had moral implications ; it may be said that the inferiority as prose of Boccaccio's ' virtuous ' stories reflects a world which was not concerned with the traditional moral outlook, which it did not abandon but, on the whole, simply ignored. The moral indifference of so much of his work scarcely needs Papini's romantic sensationalism to account for it ; it was simply a general characteristic of Boccaccio's world.

One event, however, exposed the moral crisis latent in fourteenth-century society. The Great Plague was a decisive event

in the life of other men besides Boccaccio ; its effect may be felt in the difference between the suave and sentimental limpidity of the *canzoni* addressed by Petrarch to Laura still living and the mortified tone of the laboured, allegorical *Trionfi* written after her death. The earlier *canzoni* are concerned with the expression or analysis of isolated sentimental states ; the new insistence on death in the *Trionfi* is never successfully related, as in Dante, to any coherent religious outlook. Allegory no longer represents, as it had done for Dante, a living way of thinking and feeling ; the various representations of Love, Death, Time, and Eternity are not significantly related to one another, and the intellectual content of the allegory is thin and imperfectly developed. Love triumphs over the poet, Chastity over Love, Death over Chastity: Fame conquers Death, Time, Fame, and Eternity triumphs over Time ; it is clear that allegory of this type has no relation to the realities of experience. The most living thing in the *Trionfi* is a preoccupation with the death of the body, which completely dominates and conditions the ' spirituality ' nominally set against it:

> ' Quella leggiadra e gloriosa donna
> ch'è oggi *ignudo spirto* e *poca terra*.'[1]
>
> (*Trionfo della Morte*, I).

The emphasis is not on ' spirto,' but on the accompanying adjective; the spirit after death is ' ignudo ' because the body, without which Petrarch cannot imagine its survival, is reduced to ' poca terra.' Writing scarcely a generation after Dante's death, Petrarch has completely lost that intellectual conviction of the reality of the spiritual life, and of its continuity with the present life, which made the *Divina Commedia* possible ; that is why his allegorical scheme corresponds to nothing real in his experience. Allegory is only a valid condition of thinking and feeling so long as the physical and spiritual aspects of existence are seen as related parts, in mutual inter-dependence, of a single and intelligible whole ; otherwise the intellectual scheme will remain an abstraction, unrelated to the human material of poetry. For Petrarch, the ' spiritual ' only

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[1]Compare, from the canzone ' Quando il soave mio fido conforto ' :

> ' Spirito *ignudo* sono, e'n ciel mi godo:
> Quel che tu cerchi, è *terra* già molt'anni.'

exists as a refuge from the decay of the body ; his only philosophy is a kind of mortified Stoic resignation to Fortune which implies the lack of any positive conviction :

> ' Questi è colui che'l mondo chiama Amore ;
> *amaro*, come vedi, e vedrai meglio
> quando fia tuo, com'è nostro signore . . .
> Ei nacque d'ozio e di lascivia umana,
> nudrito di *penser dolci soavi*,
> fatto signore e dio da gente *vana*.' (*Trionfo d'Amore*, I).

> ' Miser chi speme in cosa mortal pone!'
> (*Trionfo della Morte*, I).

In Boccaccio, the Plague replaced indifference by fear and a simple sense of inadequacy. The account of it with which he prefaces the *Decameron* is full of phrases like : ' la crudeltà del cielo,' ' Et in quella non valendo alcuno senno nè umano provvedimento.' It is well known that Boccaccio was moved by a visit from the preacher Gioacchino Ciani in 1362 to repent the tone of his literary work in view of the immanence of death ; but this moral crisis of his late life can be related to feelings already present in the *Decameron*. The assumed light-heartedness of many parts of the work is a reaction against the fear of death. The characters in the famous prologue cut themselves off from the events of the outside world ; but even that gaiety often implies fear. Pampinea commands that no servant, if sent out of the secluded retreat to make some necessary contact with that world, should bring back ' dove che egli vada, onde che egli torni, che che egli oda o vegga, niuna novella *altro che lieta*.' The emphasis and what it implies are both unmistakable. The prose of the famous account of the plague is, like that of the ' moral ' stories, heavily latinized ; but the complexity represents, no longer mere lack of interest, but emptiness, the absence of anything positive to set against the fear it conveys : an emptiness which can be detected also in the various stories in which Boccaccio dwells upon death and corruption. But we must not go too far. It is true that we find in the *Decameron* that sense of the dissolution of authority and the breakdown of law which is so stressed by Papini : ' E in tanta afflizione e miseria della nostra città era la reverenda autorità delle leggi così divine

come umane, quasi caduta e dissoluta tutta, per li ministri e esecutori di quelle, li quali sì come gli altri uomini, erano tutti o morti o infermi o sì di famigle rimasi stremi, che ufficio alcuno non potean fare: per la qual cosa era a ciascuno licito quanto a grado gli era d'adoperare.' But it is not possible to deduce from this, as Papini suggests, that Boccaccio regarded this state of license with pleasure, or as anything other than a disaster. To describe his work as 'anarchic' is misleading, not only because it implies that he accepted and willed, in a manner characteristic of certain tendencies in modern romanticism, what he actually feared. but also because it does not account for the humanity and limpidity of his best work. One must always remember Boccaccio's vivacity and immediacy, and the fact that his best stories may not only have a long 'popular' history behind them, but also represent the virtues of his society ; and these qualities are not merely accidental gifts in an essentially 'immoral' writer, but a vital element in the tradition Papini is endeavouring to trace.

I have considered Papini's treatment of Boccaccio at some length because it illustrates most of his interests and deficiencies. When dealing with a poet whose sensibility operates on principles totally removed from his own, as in the case of Dante, the results are disastrous. The gap between Papini's romantic sensationalism and Dante's conception of poetry can be gauged from his argument against treating Virgil as an allegorical representation of Reason: 'Come avrebbe dunque potuto Dante sceglier come simbolo della Ragione un poeta . . . quando la poesia è, per sua essenza, estro, intuizione, entusiasmo, estasi, cioè, in tutto diversa dall'attività ragionativa e scientifica.' On such a view, the harmony between personal and universal interests, the correspondence between the Christian synthesis and a profoundly personal development—at once linguistic, personal, political, philosophical, and mystical—is completely obscured. The result is, apart from one or two striking observations, a wordy travesty which scarcely repays detailed consideration. There is no clearer proof that Papini's Catholicism seems to have done almost nothing to protect him from the more unfortunate influences of modern Italian culture.

D. A. Traversi.

# CORRESPONDENCE

## THE *PEP* REPORT ON THE PRESS

Sir,

Much could be said on the general issues raised by your review of the PEP Report on the British Press in the December issue of *Scrutiny* but I will resist the temptation, even at the risk that such self-restraint will be classed by your engaging contributor as fresh evidence of what he so delightfully terms ' the hesitancy of the imperfectly educated.' As one of the most imperfectly educated members of the group concerned I had, however, hoped that your review would give some enlightenment upon the subject of criticism by the popular Press of current books, plays, music, art and films. The PEP Report points out the ' perfunctory or irresponsible treatment ' which such subjects often receive and emphasizes that journalistic treatment of such subjects ' may contribute either to raising the standards of public understanding and appreciation, or to a very serious lowering of standards and misrepresentation of values.' We called attention to the need not only for selecting competent critics but for protecting them against ' advertising considerations, political considerations, or deference to powerful outside interests, such as film corporations, theatre managers' associations and others.' We recognized the difficulties of book reviewers, but criticized multiple reviewing and tendencies to log-rolling, and the many types of questionable influence exerted through parties, free seats, and presents for critics. We found ' a tendency to flatter democracy by ridiculing or dismissing whatever was abstruse, difficult or novel,' and a parallel tendency to review on the basis of current fashions and reputations, suggesting that the ' overwhelming stress on the political, the topical, the economic in books may itself appear to do literature a serious disservice.' We also referred to the relative absence of criticisms of broadcasting and the tendency in theatrical treatment for ' full notices by competent critics to be replaced by photographs of first nights, gossip paragraphs, and news stories.'

I had hoped that *Scrutiny*, as one of the few journals devoted to criticism, would give an illuminating opinion on these specific

and far-reaching charges, and I was surprised to find that your reviewer's only reference to them read as follows:

> 'Typical of the general attitude is the complaint that the one "cultural subject" mishandled by reporters is Science. Whereas, "in some of the popular newspapers the quality of book criticism is remarkably high." In the "class" newspaper, the critics, or at any rate those who cover art, music, literature and drama, are men and women in the front rank of their respective subjects.'

Not only is this, I submit, an unpardonably distorted version of what the Report says, but your reviewer has even gone so far as to drop out, without giving any clue to the omission, a sentence which comes between the words 'remarkably high' and the next sentence he quotes. The omitted sentence reads 'The task of reviewing books is sometimes, however, regarded as a matter within the competence of the office boy, or as a pleasant change for the sports reporter.' If this sentence had been reproduced within its context your critic's opening assertion would of course have collapsed at once, and its omission is natural if the object of criticism as he sees it is to prove a case by the suppression of the other side. What I would like to know is whether you consider this an honest and reputable form of criticism. I shall be obliged if you will give this letter as much prominence in your next issue as the misleading statements to which you have given currency.

MAX NICHOLSON.

16 Queen Anne's Gate, S.W.1.

We are grateful to Mr. Nicholson for calling attention to the omission of a sentence from the passage quoted by Mr. Mason in his review, and we apologize unreservedly, both to PEP and our readers, for any false impression that this omission, together with the sentence explained below by Mr. Mason, may have produced. Any suggestion that the Report, in dealing with the unsatisfactory state of the Press on the cultural side, so failed in one of its obvious functions as not to offer adverse criticism of the state of reviewing is, as Mr. Nicholson points out, and as the reader may readily verify by turning up the Report (PEP, 10/6), contrary

to the facts, and we much regret having printed anything interpretable as conveying such a suggestion.

Where the broader issue is concerned, we are glad of an opportunity of publishing Mr. Nicholson's own account of the Report's findings on reviewing and criticism in the Press.

MR. MASON writes:

I must offer an unreserved apology for the unfortunate dropping of a sentence in the quotation beginning ' in some of the popular newspapers . . . ' And I can see now—being abroad, I had no opportunity of going over my proofs—that the exigencies of compression produced a sentence which, taken by itself, has an effect of misstatement that was certainly not intended (my point gained nothing by my clumsiness):

> ' Typical of the general attitude is the complaint that the one " cultural subject " mishandled by reporters is Science.'

The suggestion that nothing but Science received attention under the head of ' mishandling ' was entirely unintended: I deplore the sentence, and again offer my unreserved apology for any misunderstanding it may have caused. I meant that the one adequately made complaint (as I judged), in the Report's consideration of ' cultural subjects,' regarded Science—that only in the consideration of Science were the important issues involved in 'mishandling' realized. I was impressed by the adequacy of the Report on the side of Science and intended to make a contrast. I wish I had had room to dwell more on that adequacy, which was significant from my point of view: the bias of the Report seems to me that of minds of preponderantly scientific training or interests.

But I protest against the charge of wilful distortion. It seems to me partly to rest on a misunderstanding of my point. It is the last sentence of the abbreviated quotation which illustrates the attitude I wished to criticize. I am prepared to agree that often the reviews in popular newspapers are on a higher level than that of the rest of the reading matter. But for my argument whether this is so or not is immaterial. What I wanted to stress was the Group's failure to see that it is the best critical writing in the best papers which is so pitifully inadequate to the standards expected

of serious reviewing. To notice the obvious defects in popular reviewing was, of course, proper and I nowhere charge the Report with failure on this head (to have emphasized that these defects had received attention would have suited my purpose). The Report seemed to me good enough to deserve ' to be judged by the severest standards,' and in this light I found after repeated readings and as careful a weighing of all that could be said in favour as I could manage that the essential problems were not seen or were confused. It may have been asking too much to expect PEP to agree that good criticism is not to be found in the newspapers, or to realize that ' imperfectly educated ' was not a cheap sneer, and, in general, the attitude of the review may be found intolerably ' high-falutin'.' But, at least, such expectations are a compliment to serious work ; they raise issues which should be met by argument and which will not, I hope, be dismissed by accusing the reviewer of disreputable intentions.

Let me end by making the nature of those issues quite plain in brief (since in my review I apparently did not make them plain) :

For the Group the serious aspect of the problem lies in the more obvious defects and abuses of reviewing, which they call attention to. For me it presents itself when the Report states, with the implication that the reviewing here is of high quality : ' In the " class " newspaper, the critics, or at any rate those who cover art, music, literature and drama, are men and women in the front rank of their respective subjects.' My contention is that if, in the field of these subjects, the Group had applied standards equivalent to those they applied in dealing with Science, they could not have made any such statement. It is a radical difference in judgment, in valuation, between the Group and myself : to bring it out seemed to me a main duty in my review.

H. A. Mason.

# COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

## A 'CORRESPONDING BUREAU'?

It has been suggested that we should invite answers to the following inquiry:

On the assumption that there are a fair number of people who are living in varying degrees of isolation in an environment more or less intractable ; who miss the stimulus of personal contact and informal exchange of opinion ; who being so isolated and thrown back upon themselves are unable properly to receive or reflect the radiating influence of the supposed nucleus (*Scrutiny*)—would it be a good idea to establish a ' Corresponding Bureau,' the aims being: to put these people in touch with each other ; to give an opportunity for the development of divergent views arising directly or indirectly from criticism of the consensus of opinion apparent in the pages of *Scrutiny* ; to ' compare notes ' in all fields, the sociological (a conspicuous gap in *Scrutiny*), and educational ; to ventilate opinion on such questions as the political implications of *Scrutiny* ; to note generally neglected features in the literary world ; to form a body to conduct investigations such as the *Scrutiny of Examinations* ; to establish foreign contacts ; to arrange for actual meetings ; to foster individual talent by criticism before publication, and to stimulate such talent by the prospect of a select and varied audience capable of welcoming it?

Opinions should be addressed to the Editors.

# SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

*THE CLUE TO HISTORY, by John Macmurray (Student Christian Movement Press, 7/6 net).*

It seems to me deplorable that in trying to express sound intuitions about the psychological facts of social relationships Professor Macmurray should produce such a thoroughly bad book. Is it the result of being a philosopher that for him discipline and dessication are evidently the same, and that before trying to say anything that has life in it and really matters to him he should have to take a swig at some emotional inebriant? It isn't just Jesus and the Jewish consciousness and private interpretations of Christianity, though the craving to sanction his outlook by this idiom of expression is lamentable enough. Worse than this is his technique of pseudo-statement. The method is, in the course of several paragraphs, gradually to colour some word with emotional significance derived from an intuition ; the intuition being unstated, untested, and therefore unusable outside the confines of the holy haze.

The most important instance is the word ' personal.' ' The discovery which Jesus made was the discovery that human life is personal.' After about a dozen pages of elaboration one is able to see, given sufficient determination, the relatively simple, and vitally important, fact of social psychology that Professor Macmurray has in mind. He never states it, only gives it dim adumbration. But to the reader for whom the book is apparently intended, the habitué of summer schools and week-end conferences, that wouldn't matter. He would soon be able to ask (having outgrown Brother are you saved?), Don't you agree that the ' essential character of human life, the thing that constitutes its humanness ' (page 56) is that it's *personal*?—and that to know this ' lifts human life on to a new plane of consciou ness ' (page 58)? And if you dared ask him to say what he meant you would stand revealed as a victim of ' the dualistic consciousness,' that comprehensive blanket of darkness which Professor Macmurray sees as responsible for all shutting out of light.

But though the idiom makes me sick it would be absurd to neglect the book. The insight Professor Macmurray has achieved

into the nature of our social needs is none too common, and the more it is discussed, in whatever idiom, the better the chance of getting it and its implications realized.

He begins with the commonplace of social psychology that ' it is not the fact of common birth that makes the unity of the natural family. It is the natural love which tends to develop between members of the family because of their common experience and common interests.' But, he goes on, ' What Jesus does is to introduce the element of intention into this natural fact, and so to base the development of a really human community upon the *intention* to enter into community with one's fellows, because they are one's fellows.' That is what lies behind the precept ' love your enemies.' This is not an ' ideal,' which in Professor Macmurray's arbitrary usage is something set apart from practice, but 'a precept defining at once the character of a personal community and the direction of activity which intends to bring it into existence.'

> ' To the question, " Why should I love people who don't love me?" Jesus answers, " Because that is the only way to establish a human relation between you and them." To the further question, " But why should I try to establish a human relation between myself and them?" Jesus' answer might be, " Because that is what you are made for, and that is what your human nature really wants." '

This, I think, is the nearest he comes to saying what he means. I take it to be an assertion that if we are fully sensitive to our social needs we cannot be indifferent to the knowledge that *anyone* dislikes us or disagrees with us, however little material power he may have to interfere with us. If we fully develop our social interest we cannot regard anyone as irrelevant to us. (There are devices, which Professor Macmurray does not mention, for denying a human being social relevance: the main one is to label him ' abnormal.').

That this is what Professor Macmurray means seems evident from his view that the alternative to loving your enemies is ' hating ' them—in the sense of wishing them out of existence. If you hate people in this way it means that you regard them merely as animate obstacles, the significance of whose opposition vanishes as soon as they are out of the way. For the person who

is alive to his social nature this is not possible. You may bump your enemy off, but that doesn't eradicate the essential injury that the enmity has done—the deprivation of potential amity and reciprocal sanctioning of each other's values. This is the nearest I can get to what Professor Macmurray seems to mean, though in so far as it is intelligible it must not be supposed anything like what he says.

'The *intention* to enter into community with one's fellows' seems to mean explicitly recognizing one's fundamental social needs, and as the basis of Professor Macmurray's social and political programme it probably implies putting these social needs before anything else. This is where he is sentimentally one-sided. It is a prevailing sentimentality (come about as a swing of the pendulum) to put community before everything else. We have other sides to our nature, besides the social. And though everything we do is more satisfactory to us if the very fact of doing it confirms our sense of oneness with others, yet there are times when we have to stick to a line of action or judgment even at the cost of disrupting social relationships. We do not then abandon the intention of community: we only reject inadequate community in order not to deny other sides of our personality. Nor is it, really, just on certain occasions that this problem arises. It is continuously present as a tension between ourselves and others: we are continuously putting our own beliefs and choices to the test of being offered to our friends for assimilation into their personalities. Reciprocal challenging is as much a part of genuine social life as is reciprocal sanctioning.

It seems unlikely that Professor Macmurray would want to deny this, but he certainly neglects it. In stressing the need to love your enemies he says nothing of the equal need to resist your friends. And in fact the conception of community he offers is the inadequate one of getting together and being together, without much caring whether we *do* anything together. It suggests the earlier, intoxicated phases of a love affair with one's fellow beings.

In a review it is impossible to discuss so unhappily-formulated a central conception and still have space to do justice to the admirable secondary analyses to which Professor Macmurray proceeds. In discussing the ideas of equality, freedom, money, and 'individual self-realization,' he excels at exposing the inherent

contradictions and the self-defeating nature of some of the institutions and ideals of a class-divided society.

Whenever he detects an incompatibility between an institution and the basic human craving to have friendly relationships with all one's fellows, he is confident of the ultimate defeat of that institution. His confidence is based on the conviction that the basic human needs are unchanging, and that no social institution can permanently deny or distort them. Against this position, needless to say, some sociologists and anthropologists would train very heavy guns. I should like to think he was right. But clearly this is too vast a question to broach now. One can only hope that he will write some more books, with more faith in the possibilities of definition and statement. It will be highly regrettable if Professor Macmurray cannot be shaken in the conviction that all the hopeless misapprehension that his book meets (of which this review is very likely an example) is entirely due to the novelty of the truth he has seen.

D. W. HARDING.

## THE HISTORIAN'S TASK

*ASPECTS OF HISTORY, by E. E. Kellett (Jonathan Cape, 5/-).*
*THE MODERN HISTORIAN, by C. H. Williams (Thomas Nelson, 7/6).*

Both these books testify, in Mr. Kellett's words, to 'the inextricable confusion in the minds of historians as to the nature of their task' and to the fact that during the past fifty years historians have written primarily for specialists rather than for the general public. Mr. Kellett's book, which contains chapters on history as theology, literature, propaganda, science, politics, ethics and economics, is intended as a kind of Cook's tour for the guidance of the common reader. Persons who are more seriously interested in history will derive little illumination from it, and will find its self-consciously literary style somewhat irritating. Mr. Williams's book is an anthology designed to illustrate the theories and methods

of twentieth-century English historians. The extracts appear to be fairly chosen, though it is unfortunate that Mr. Toynbee's *Study of History*, perhaps the most interesting of recent historical writings, is not more adequately represented.

The importance of the study of history has never been greater than to-day. For in addition to its real cultural value, which is simply that it broadens our knowledge of human nature and human society, it has acquired fresh significance as a result of its perversion in the interest of false ideas ; every current variety of fanaticism seeks support by misinterpreting the past. The scarcity of good historical writing is therefore to be regretted. The ideal of scientific objectivity (Germany's retaliation for England's gift to Prussia of Carlyle) and the consequent retreat of historians into the laboratory left a vacuum which has been filled by journalists, propagandists and charlatans. This indictment is perhaps overstated, since history which is also literature has never wholly disappeared ; but it is undeniable that the greatest historians of the past half-century—F. W. Maitland, for example—have remained unknown to the general public, while those academic historians who have won popular acclaim—such as Mr. Trevelyan and Mr. Fisher—have been distinguished by their adherence to patriotic prejudices which are both historically unjustifiable and politically harmful (it is, for example, recorded in Mr. Fisher's History of Europe that British rule in India is a realization of the ideals of Plato's Republic).

The notion that history is a science—as stated with such emphasis by J. B. Bury—is difficult to explain and still more difficult to defend ; and the adoption of it can only induce among historians a paralysing lack of self-confidence. It is indisputable that historical events ought to be ascertained and verified with a scientific objectivity—that they should not be invented or wilfully misrepresented ; but events are merely the raw material of history, as laboratory observations are of science. The characteristic of science is its power to summarize observations in a general hypothesis, to test a hypothesis by experiment, and to use it for purposes of prediction and control. History, however, cannot frame any universally applicable hypothesis ; for it can never isolate chains of events or test hypothesis by experiment ; the number of independent variables and the possibilities of interference

by unpredictable biological (*e.g.*, births of men of genius) and geological (*e.g.*, earthquakes) factors are always too great. Yet historians cannot limit themselves to the statement of events. For in the first place the selection of events implies standards of importance; and in the second place the method in which events are linked with each other usually involves some conception as to what factors are of most importance in determining human behaviour. It is thus impossible for historians not to have what may be called—perhaps too grandiloquently—a philosophy ; and if they are not conscious of it, they will be dominated by it all the more forcefully.

To say this is to say that history is an art and that one derives from it the same kind of illumination as from literature. The question of the relationship between history and literature has usually been argued on the narrow basis of style ; but efforts to achieve an elegant prose do not make good history any more than they make great literature, and the self-conscious stylists are as irritating in one field as in the other. History is an art because it must inevitably express the individual point of view of the writer. This does not imply that breadth and accuracy of factual knowledge are unimportant. Opinions are based on experience ; and the wider the range of experience, and the more objectively it is apprehended, the sounder will be the opinions. Narrow sympathies and unconscious prejudices vitiate a work of literature as much as a work of history. Good history resembles good fiction in that it gives us the same sense of the independent and living reality of other human beings, that it presents their behaviour not as explicable in terms of scientific law but as predestined in terms of character and situation—an intuition which is at the root of all drama—and that the generalizations which it suggests belong—to use a trite distinction—to wisdom rather than to knowledge. Most students of history, for example, would subscribe to such principles as that social groups act in accordance with their interests and are not normally capable of altruism, that an idea has little influence unless it expresses or justifies an interest, that fundamental social changes are always slow, that power corrupts and long-continued privilege enervates, that successful revolutions are the work not of oppressed groups but of rising groups, and that wars, reforms and revolutions never completely fulfil either the hopes of their friends or the fears of their enemies. None of these, however,

can claim the status of a scientific law. They are, on the contrary, the same kind of guiding principles that the man of intelligence and sensitivity formulates on the basis of his personal experience.

H. B. PARKES.

## THE PROGRESS OF POETRY

*MODERN POETRY, by Louis MacNeice (Oxford, 7/6).*

*THE YEAR'S POETRY, 1938, edited by D. Kilham Roberts and Geoffrey Grigson (Lane, 5/-).*

*Modern Poetry* is a ' plea for *impure* poetry, that is for poetry conditioned by the poet's life and the world around him (since this description applies to all poetry of any considerable merit, why should it need a special defence?) and—by quotations—it invites comparisons with the poetic manifestos of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Arnold and of Eliot. Mr. McNeice does three things ; he sketches his own literary self-portrait, he attempts to establish himself and his friends as the poetic successors of Eliot and Yeats and he adds chapters on such topics as imagery and rhythm. The treatment given to these subjects is of a kind that one would ordinarily expect from someone who had read nothing more advanced than a school history of literature, though, as the following pronouncements show, the tone is one of deliberation and of authority:

> ' . . . the poet should select material which vitally interests him personally rather than material which is fashionable. If, however, he is a fairly normal person (and it is desirable that poets should be neither half-wits nor out-and-out mystics nor any kind of extraordinary pervert) the result should not be esoteric.' (p. 5).
>
> ' It is a mistake to think of a poet's image as merely an embellishment . . . often the image, as in Dante, is there to clarify or ram home the meaning.' (p. 90).
>
> ' The case for rhyme is that it is in itself attractive—musical —and makes for memorability (besides setting the poet a healthy

technical problem). The case against rhyme is that, being obviously artificial, it suggests insincerity and that it lulls the reader into a pleasant coma. There are many ways of compromising between these two schools of thought.' (p. 130).

and so ' on and on, and up and up.'

However, since the *Times Literary Supplement* gave the book a lengthy review praising Mr. MacNeice's critical ' detachment,' in which he is compared to Coleridge writing on Wordsworth, and since it also made it the text for a first leader, I do not think that it is shouting ' Wolf! Wolf!' to suggest that *Modern Poetry* is a sign of a concerted movement in the literary world. I don't suggest that Mr. MacNeice's nullity is a deliberate attempt to discredit serious discussion of literature. He may not consciously intend to enlarge the reputation of his friends at the expense of Yeats and Mr. Eliot, whose greatness is anyway not in need of demonstration in this review, but his book inevitably gives rise to general conclusions about the way in which taste is being guided.

These quotations will illustrate his argument and mine:

' With Eliot we meet a poet who has a world-view and is interested in the study of mankind. His world-view is defeatist and he sees mankind through the glasses of a pedant, but he is at least civilized, and synoptic(!) and—with allowance made for his pedantry—a realist. And for all his talk in his critical writings of impersonality, Eliot is a very personal poet.' (p. 12).

' The squalor of Eliot was a romanticised squalor because treated, on the whole, rather bookishly as décor.' (p. 74).

yet *Triumphal March* ' is fatally broken up by a prose catalogue of armaments.' (p. 165).

' But Yeats' world-view is so esoteric that he can only escape from literature at odd moments.' (p. 24).

' Yeats's sound is so good that many readers do not bother about precise meaning ; they get a general impression of otherworldliness, of a mystical faith, of an attitude to the passage of time.' (p. 169).

Lawrence

' . . . had not inherited the stale thought of a class. But, on the other hand, for the reason that he moved out of his class,

his thought and vision faded. Compare one of his later novels, *The Plumed Serpent* with the early *Sons and Lovers*.' (p. 76).

After all this defeatism and defeat Mr. MacNeice's friends are ' tragic ' even when gloomy.

' The poets of *New Signatures* are interested in Man Functioning. They select their details . . . in order to illustrate the workings of vital principles.' (p. 29).

' The poet is once again to make his response as a whole.' (*ibid*).

' The younger poets are less conditioned by culture and more concerned with life *as they live it*.[1] (None of them, incidentally, has followed a purely literary profession. Spender has never had a job, but has given much time to political work). Where Eliot insists that the poet should be an observer, impersonal, looking at the stream from the bank, these younger poets do not cut off their poetic activity from their activity in general.' (p. 169).

' Their poetry may be expected to become clearer side by side with their philosophy, provided the public itself becomes at home with such a philosophy.' (p. 177).

' When the crisis comes, poetry may for the time be degraded or even silenced, but it will re-appear as one of the chief embodiments of human dignity, when people once more have time for play and criticism.' (Finale).

For all his newly-acquired Marxist sympathies Mr. MacNeice is here playing the well-known bourgeois game of passing off the mediocre and the watered-down as the excellent, and he does it with all the pompousness, irresponsibility and tendentiousness which characterize the older generation of middlebrow propagandists, whom *Scrutiny* used to refer to as literary racketeers. With his Marxism *and* his citations of Housman as an authority, his donnish doubts about satire being poetry, his ignorance and obtuseness about the Metaphysicals, Dryden and Pope and his classical references, Mr. MacNeice keeps well in with both wings of the movement. One wouldn't trouble about the book if it stood alone, but along with the notices in the *Times Literary Supplement* and

[1]Mr. MacNeice's italics.

with current Left-wing criticism generally (not to mention Messrs. Auden and Isherwood's début in *The Bystander*) it looks alarmingly like part of another attempt on a far bigger scale than before to discourage an artistic revival and to stabilize a taste for the second-rate.

*The Year's Poetry, 1938,* of which the predecessor four years ago was commended by Sir Hugh Walpole, gives no support whatever to Mr. MacNeice's contentions. There is nothing in it which does not derive from—or was made possible by—the earlier generation of poets or the earlier work of this generation, except a uniform dullness and inability to make a clearly definable impression. A stanza by Mr. George Woodcock will serve as illustration:

> I shall do the thing the neatest and cleanest way.
> Cord rots soon. I shall drop to the floor.
> I shall be found behind the kitchen door
> Sprawling untidily on the trodden clay.

There are worse and better in the book, but that is typical of a prevailing cleverness, combined with uncertainty as to the degree of seriousness intended. There is no point in drawing detailed attention to the various resemblances, from Mr. Day Lewis[1] to Shakespeare in *King Lear* to Miss Tucker's to Mr. Herbert Read in his war poems. Mr. Empson's *Just a Smack at Auden* is too much like a slap on the back. The first stanza of Mr. Auden's *Dover* reminds us that he once wrote, for example, 'Who stands the crux left of the watershed . . . ':

> Steep roads, a tunnel through the downs, are the approaches ;
> A ruined pharos overlooks a constructed bay ;
> The sea-front is almost elegant ; all this show
> Has, somewhere inland, a vague and dirty root:
> Nothing is made in this town.

GEOFFREY WALTON.

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[1]The poem by Mr. Day Lewis, *Sex-Crime*, comes from his latest volume, *Overtures to Death* (Cape, 5/-), the depressing Left-wing jingoism of which is very effectively analysed in the final number of *The Criterion*.

# THE FATE OF EDWARD THOMAS

*THE CHILDHOOD OF EDWARD THOMAS: a fragment of autobiography (Faber, 6/-).*

*AS IT WAS . . . WORLD WITHOUT END, by Helen Thomas (Heinemann, 5/-).*

It is difficult to decide with oneself whether Edward Thomas's autobiographical ' fragment ' is disappointing or not (it is certainly something that every admirer of his poetry will want to have). What more could one have expected? It is a sensitive record of memories of childhood, and if one asks oneself whether it doesn't seem a little external, one is paying a tribute to its scrupulousness. Would a greater analytic particularity really have sorted with the kind of recapture of experience that Thomas is intent on? And, poignant as the flavours of ' significance ' may be for ourselves, isn't it largely illusion that we can, in our own recollecting of childhood, grasp a richer inwardness? Our own ' externalities ' are not such for us ; they are unique, real (even if elusive) and ours.

*The Childhood of Edward Thomas* contains a note or two that would seem to be of special interest to psychologists. But what, in an account of life in varied lower-middle-class environments (for the most part) is perhaps most significant for admirers of the poetry is the intimation of a certain lack of complete at-homeness in Edward's Thomas's life at home. In particular, his temperament was painfully out of resonance with his father's.

The autobiographical fragment carries the story of his life to the point at which Mrs. Thomas takes it up. Her two memoirs, to which their simple integrity combined with delicate rightness of touch should give a permanent place in literature, are, it is worth noting, now obtainable in one volume. The Edward Thomas they portray is of the essentially unhappy temperament intimated in the poetry. D. W. Harding, in his *Note on Nostalgia* (see *Determinations*) suggests that the unhappiness is that of a man who, without admitting it, craves for the adequate social group he has not found. He had certainly failed in obvious ways to find himself, and to find a purpose in life satisfactorily related to his powers. Already well on the way to being established as a pro-

fessional writer, yet essentially callow and defenceless, he had, as Mrs. Thomas shows him to us, the extraordinarily bad luck to go up to Oxford in 1897, when the 'Nineties were still the 'Nineties, and Oxford, apparently, an irresistible enchantment. He whose natural taste was for the prose of Richard Jefferies, and whose endowments were much like those of Jefferies, subscribed to the taste of the *Yellow Book*—admired Pater, Oscar Wilde, John Addington Symonds and the rest. For years he cultivated a Paterian manner in his own writing.

He married while an undergraduate, and committed himself to letters as a profession. For a man of his fineness and this inner confusion the sense of futility and frustration that dogged him through life was fore-ordained. The hardships and uncertainties of a literary career, uncongenial tasks and overwork, would, of course, account for a great deal of depression. But it seems pretty plain that even if Thomas had had economic liberty to write what he liked he wouldn't have known how to satisfy himself. The critical admirations he professes—and he was incapable of insincerity in any ordinary sense—indicate this: it is not possible that anyone, least of all a man of his quality, should really have admired some of the contemporary versifiers he thought he admired. That he should have felt so much

> How dreary-swift, with naught to travel to,
> Is Time

seems understandable. He was perhaps unlucky in falling on a period when there was no influence, critical or other, to give him the jog that might have enabled him to find himself.

As a poet, of course, he got his jog from Robert Frost, and wrote his poetry at the very end of his life when in the army (the relief with which he surrendered himself to the purpose provided by the war is significant). This poetry is devoted almost wholly to expressing the characteristic unhappiness of his life, and has corresponding limitations of the kind that D. W. Harding indicates. Yet there it is, a fine and unique, if decidedly limited, poetry; the particular thing it is—and it expresses a representative kind of modern experience—conditioned by that particular history of the poet. A happy Edward Thomas might have written no poetry at all. And yet it is hard to believe that the man who wrote a

poetry so original and fine could not, with better luck, have produced something less negative in its essential attitudes—for there is an obvious sense in which ' negative ' applies to his actual work. It is perhaps a tribute to the positive virtue of this ' negativeness ' that the Group—the post-Eliot Group—have not co-opted him into their bosom along with ' Wilfrid ' and ' Kathy.' And it is worth noting that Georgian taste, though he has perhaps suffered from having made his *début* in Georgian pastoral company, didn't take to him. Harold Monro, for instance, could see nothing in his work.

Edward Thomas, in fact, got no recognition while he was alive and hasn't had his due yet.

F. R. Leavis.

## HART CRANE FROM THIS SIDE

*THE COLLECTED POEMS OF HART CRANE (Boriswood, 7/6).*

At last it is possible for the reader on this side of the Atlantic to come to a conclusion about the legend of Hart Crane. It was a most impressive legend. So far as one could see, all American critics, with whatever reservations about the actual achievement, were agreed that the poet who walked off the steamer into the sea in 1932, ending at much the same age as Shelley, was a genius of peculiar contemporary significance. The odds and ends of him one came on in American periodicals, together with the kind of claim made for him by the critics, left one wondering. And now that the texts are fully to hand the conclusion seems unavoidable that if the legend, at any rate, remains significant, it is not because of any genius in Hart Crane.

The genius had manifested itself above all, one gathered, in a heroic effort at the creation of an American myth. Of *The Bridge*, the work embodying the effort, it seems fair to say that Mr. Waldo Frank, who constitutes himself its interpreter, is a not unsuitable one. ' Crane,' he says, ' was a mystic.' ' Mysticism ' would appear to be an ability to take a vague, confused and grandiose gesturing towards symbolism for an achieved order and a realized significance.

> ' The revelation of *The Bridge*, as myth and principle, comes to a person in the course of his day's business ; and that person is the poet. In this sense the Poem is allied to the *Commedia* of Dante, who also, in response to desperate need, takes a journey in the course of which his need finds consummation. Lest the analogy be misleading I immediately amend it.'

The reader will not find that Mr. Frank's amendments do much to recommend the analogy. And in the following account of the Bridge symbol the stress should fall on the ' shall ' :

> ' It shall synthesize the world of chaos. It joins city, river, and sea ; man made it with his new hand. Parabolawise, it shall now vault the continent and, transmuted, reach that inward heaven which is the fulfilment of man's need of order.'

Crane's symbolism amounts to nothing more than a turgidly rhetorical ' shall,' and in spite of Mr. Frank's insistence that ' the structural pattern of *The Bridge* is superb,' the poem is a wordy chaos, both locally and in sum.

The quality of Crane's rhetoric and of his use of symbols is fairly suggested by this:

> And now, as launched in abysmal cupolas of space
> Towards endless terminals, Easters of speeding light—
> Vast engines outward veering with seraphic grace
> On clarion cylinders pass out of sight
> To course that span of consciousness thou'st named
> The Open Road—thy vision is reclaimed!
> What heritage thou'st signalled to our hands!

' Thou ' is Walt Whitman, and the relation so easily established between his ' vision,' the aeroplanes and a ' span of consciousness ' is representative of Crane's symbolizing. His main ' symbol,' Brooklyn Bridge, pregnant as the obscurities of its elaboration are meant to be, has just as much significance, no more. Crane's ambition, it is clear, was possible because of his lack of all qualification for it: having no glimpse or notion of any principles of order, he was able to take a rhapsodically vatic Whitmanesque warmth as sufficient for the undertaking, which justified itself by its very magnitude.

That the America of the 1920s should have produced a Hart Crane is not surprising. What is surprising is the critical respect the legend commands. For the question is not, as one would gather from American criticism, At what point does Crane fall short? but, Why should he enjoy any reputation at all—as a poet, that is? At any rate, I cannot see that, apart from his conviction of genius and his confidence, he had any relevant gift. Mr. Waldo Frank speaks of his ' poetic texture ' :

> ' Here is music plainly related to the Elizabethans. And here is also a sturdy lilt, like the march of those equal children of the Elizabethans—the pioneers . . . always there is this homely metronomic linking him to his fathers. Hence the organic soundness of the verse. Indeed, the entire intellectual and spiritual content of Crane's verse, and of Crane the child of modern man, could be derived from a study of his typical texture.'

Here is a piece of Crane's typical texture (the dots are his) :

> The nasal whine of power whips a new universe . . .
> Where spouting pillars spoor the evening sky,
> Under the looming stacks of the gigantic power house
> Stars prick the eyes with sharp ammoniac proverbs,
> New verities, new inklings in the velvet hummed
> Of dynamos, where hearing's leash is strummed . . .
> Power's script,—wound, bobbin-bound, refined—
> Is stropped to the slap of belts on booming spools, spurred
> Into the bulging bouillon, harnessed jelly of the stars.
> Towards what? The forked crash of split thunder parts
> Our hearing momentwise ; but fast in whirling armatures,
> As bright as frogs' eyes, giggling in the girth
> Of steely gizzards—axle-bound, confined
> In coiled precision, bunched in mutual glee
> The bearings glint,—O murmurless and shined
> In oilrinsed circles of blind ecstasy!

It is true that this doesn't illustrate the ' homely metronomic ' beating at its sturdiest lilt. It illustrates rather what happens to Crane's rhythm when he overloads the naïvely conventional romantic rhetoric (going with ' thou,' etc.) that is his basis :

> The captured fume of space foams in our ears . . .
>
> The gleaming cantos of unvanquished space . . .
>
> Time like a serpent down her shoulder, dark
> And space, an eaglet's wing, laid on her hair . . .

When he attempts modern effects—verse embodying contemporary speech—his rhythmic nullity is brutally exposed.

As for the turgid verbosities and incoherences to which even Mr. Frank admits him to be prone, it looks as if the alcoholic part of the legend would go a long way to explain them. Crane was plainly in the habit of associating alcoholic excitement with poetic inspiration, and there are signs of the habit's persisting even in the absence of the excitement. Frankly alcoholic documents are such poems as those on pages 104 and 106, and there is, significantly, an elegy addressed to Harry Crosby.

Crane's career belongs to the period chronicled in Mr. Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return*. If the legend persists even among the most intelligent American critics, a sufficient explanation is, perhaps, that implicitly conveyed when John Peale Bishop, writing on Thomas Wolfe in the first number of the new *Kenyon Review*, thus brackets Wolfe and Crane together:

> ' His position as an artist is very like that of Hart Crane. Crane was born in 1899, Wolfe in 1900, so that they were almost of an age. Both had what we must call genius ; both conceived that genius had been given them that they might celebrate, the one in poetry, the other in prose, the greatness of their country.'

Mr. Bishop offers severe and radical criticism of both, but—' genius '! The need to feel that America had at least come near to producing such genius as both conceived themselves to have is readily understood. But from this side of the Atlantic it is impossible to see genius in either.

F. R. Leavis.

# HŒLDERLIN

*HŒLDERLIN, by Reginald Peacock (Methuen, 10/6).*

There are many reasons why Hölderlin, apart from the attraction of novelty, should have become since the war something of a cult both in England and Germany. His romantic idealizing temperament as well as his unhappy career have naturally attracted those whose interest is in poetic personalities, rather than in poetry. In his unvarying enthusiasm (Begeisterung) he reminds us at times of Shelley ; in his innocence, his finer moments of vision, he is sometimes like Wordsworth. But comparisons with English poets are dangerously misleading. That which makes Hölderlin important to-day, which demands something more than a merely literary-historical approach, is his unquestionable poetic talent, the superiority of his technique, which is evident even to the foreigner,

Mit gelben Birnen hänget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

It is impossible for the foreigner to define exactly the superiority of these characteristic lines ; one can only point to the simple felicity of the phrasing—a simplicity which implies a particular concentration—and the impact with which a phrase like ' heilignüchterne ' strikes even the reader who is unaware of its especial meaning in Hölderlin's verse.

Much of Hölderlin's thought (and it is with this that Mr. Peacock is chiefly preoccupied) can be related to that of his

contemporaries, and in particular to Rousseau, Winkelmann and Novalis. His conceptions of Nature, of Mankind in relation to Nature, and of the role of the Poet and the Hero in society are characteristically romantic.

> Heilige Gefässe sind die Dichter
> Worin des Lebens Wein, der Geist
> Der Helden sich aufbewahrt. (Buonaparte).

His Diotima is not unlike Shelley's idealized Emilia Viviani

> Schönes Leben, du lebst wie die zarten Blüten im Winter
> In der gealterten Welt lebst du verschlossen allein.
> Liebend strebst du hinaus, dich zu warmen am Licht des Frühlings
> Zu erwarmen an ihm sucht die Jugend der Welt . . .

Hölderlin, like Novalis, is distinguished by the consistency and disinterestedness of his thought and by his natural piety ; these intellectual qualities are paralleled by his emotional exaltation and his simple directness of expression. Goethe and Schiller hellenized. But Goethe's Hellenism often seems academic and not a little affected, and Schiller's Hellenism was merely a medium, giving rhetorical expression to his own ethos, his Humanität. Few poets have hellenized so consistently as Hölderlin. What often seems unnatural stylization according to a model in Goethe, seems in Hölderlin a natural personal idiom. Hölderlin, like the Weimar poets, saw in Hellas the realization of his ideals ; but with a more naïve and perhaps more honest mind than Goethe, his evocations of Hellas are more convincing. Similarly, his pious belief in the day when

> Die Berge des deutschen
> Landes Berge der Musen sind,
> Wie die herrlichen einst, Pindos und Helikon
> Und Parnassos, und rings unter des Vaterlands
> Goldnem Himmel, die freie
> Klare geistige Freude glänzt.

cannot be confused with the more militant patriotism of Arndt or Kleist.

Perhaps one can best appreciate Hölderlin's importance, if one considers his work negatively. In an age of ' sensibility,' Hölderlin

refused to wear his heart on his sleeve ; his verse is generally exalted in tone (the poet was, for Hölderlin, the Seer), but controlled by a verbal discipline which prevents his raptures from becoming—except in his very latest work—incoherent or fantastic. In an age of affected classicizing, Hölderlin was nearer to the Greek spirit than perhaps any other European. In a materialistic world, he remained true to his ideals ; he could not, like Goethe, compromise with the world. Yet one must not be blind to his limitations. Although his letters show that he was not devoid of social sense, his poetry is remote; it does not deal with actualities; its rhapsodies deny it any acute psychological perceptiveness, comparable with, say, Blake's ; and it has little dramatic potentialities. But these limitations themselves enhance Hölderlin's positive achievement, his technical ability, his power of infusing an apparently descriptive passage with a wealth of significance. Consider, for instance, the force of such phrases as ' freudiges dichtend,' ' scherzende ' and ' freudigschauernde ' in the following :

> Drin in den Alpen ists noch helle Nacht und die Wolke,
> Freudigesdichtend, sie deckt drinnen das gähnende Tal.
> Dahin, dorthin toset und stürzt die scherzende Bergluft,
> Schroff durch Tannen herab glänzet und schwindet ein Strahl
> Langsem eilt und kämpft das freudigschauernde Chaos
> Jung an Gestalt, doch stark feiert es liebenden Streit . . .
> (Heimkunft).

Mr. Peacock's book is frankly disappointing. One can think of many similar books on English poets. It is one of those pretentious pseudo-critical works, which concerns itself for the most part with the elucidation of Hölderlin's 'philosophical background'; it abounds in clichés about the ' cosmic ' or the ' mythical ' aspects of Hölderlin's verse; it has every prospect of becoming popular with candidates for the Modern Languages Tripos. The chapter divisions are arbitrary, and, worse still, the language is vaguely generalizing and intolerably repetitive: ' The poems are saturated with the philosophical interpretation of human life, history and culture ' or ' He was not simply an extraordinary poetic phenomenon ; he had a philosophy of gravity and depth.'

But it is in his effort to describe the characteristics of Hölderlin's verse itself—which he relegates to the last chapter—

that Mr. Peacock fully displays his incompetence. He can say little which the reader cannot discover for himself ; his phrasing is sometimes positively uncouth. These are representative passages, which speak for themselves. ' He does it by his mythical manner, and by tone and rhythm.' ' Sometimes, indeed, because of the very swell and overfulness . . . there is a certain monumental quality ; something comparable is found in Michel Angelo and Beethoven.' And his final summary: ' He scaled heights which very few have touched . . . He has quite a remarkable spiritual centre of gravity, which is felt throughout his work.'

Hölderlin is an important poet, who deserves to be better known in England. This time he has been unfortunate in his advocate.

H. L. Bradbrook.

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCOTLAND IN ALLEGORY

*THE HOUSE WITH THE GREEN SHUTTERS, by George Douglas (' World's Classics,' 2/-).*

The appearance of George Douglas Brown's single novel *The House with the Green Shutters* as a ' World's Classic,' suggests that the book has claims both to be regarded as a ' classic ' and nearly forty years after its first appearance (1901) to be read. Whether or not it has claims to be read is the test ; for a classic that will be content to ornament a bookshelf is a classic of a very equivocal kind. It was doubtless the vogue half a century ago of idyllic ' kailyard ' fiction that provoked George Douglas to the prosaic ' realism ' of his book. But what appears rather to sustain it is an almost terrifying dissatisfaction with the Scotland itself he had known. The book not merely implies a criticism of certain other books that in any case are no longer read—that it killed the ' kailyard ' type of fiction in its historical importance—it implies a radical *social criticism* amounting to an indictment, and it is as such that it may have its present importance ; for while I would not admit it to the highest rank as a work of the novelist's art—to the rank that is to say of *Wuthering Heights*,

the novel with which one immediately compares it in one's mind—its value *as a work of art* seems to me to depend on the values of the social criticism it successfully implies. As a ' tragedy ' detached from these implications it seems to me at once ' conventional ' as if its author were striving to conform to some exterior idea of ' tragedy ' which he supposes himself perhaps to have got from the Greeks. Expectation is preferred to surprise according to the best models ; the ' bodies ' are thought of as filling the role of the ' chorus,' and so on. The scenes of pity (not weakly indulged) and terror—horror rather—towards the end would appear to justify it as a ' tragedy ' in this conventional sense. But the source of all that power the book undoubtedly has, can, it seems to me, be shown to exist in reality in the terrible nature of its social criticism.

The novel presents a number of different individuals—centering in the members of the Gourlay family—in the setting of a small local community—that of Barbie—which is in a late phase of disintegration. Whether or not Barbie was characteristic of the Scotland of the nineteenth century must be left to someone other than the literary critic to confirm ; in any case ' Barbie ' has, I think, a general application. ' Barbie has been a decaying burgh for thirty years,' we are told explicitly in the beginning of the second chapter. To call Barbie a community is indeed to extend the meaning of the word unduly ; it has ceased to be an ' organic community ' ; there is no longer a fruitful co-operation between its members. The ' bodies ' who represent the last of the local public opinion and should have been, without necessarily knowing it, the guiding and controlling centre of the community are—destructive worms bred out of the decaying organism—idly malicious gossipers and backbiters. Yet the ' bodies ' are in a sense what has become of the past, and as traditional figures are significant, as well as richly comic. The Deacon, and for example (at the beginning of Chapter XXII) David Aird, the City bounder about to return to the City after finding Barbie ' too quiet for his tastes ' (' Thank God, we'll soon be in civilization ') form a significant comic contrast ; but it is the Deacon alone who is satirically aware of the others.

The laird and the minister who would have been shown as somewhere near the centre had the novel been written in the

eighteenth century, are little more here than dots on the periphery. The laird has sunk into identity with the surrounding commonalty. He is proud to have an evening's ' sederunt ' with old Gourlay—at least until he marries a miller's daughter (of a different sort from Tennyson's—' Her voice went with the skirl of an east wind through the rat-riddled mansion of the Hallidays '). The minister, the Rev. Mr. Struthers, is an exceptionally stupid peasant—he has taken ten years to enter the Church and has had a reverence for the university ever since, though what he reverences about it is mainly the wonder of its administrative machinery. The scene (Chapter XX) in which he congratulates the young prize-winner (' Ability to write is a splendid thing for the Church ') is one of the richest in comedy.

As for the schoolmaster he ' rarely leaves ' his studying of the theory of Political Economy—

> ' " Ay," he said dryly, " there's a wheen gay cuddies in Barbie!" and he went to his stuffy little room to study *The Wealth of Nations*.'

—a study which being disconnected from what is happening around him in Barbie is socially barren. Here there is a society without aristocratic or ecclesiastical or even pedagogic leadership or guidance. Presbyterianism itself is no longer substantial ; it persists vestigially as some of its effects. It has left behind a certain hardness and bitterness in character and conversation, an absence of sap and sweetness:

> ' " It's a fine morning, Mr. Gourlay." '
> ' " There's naething wrong with the morning," grunted Gourlay, as if there was something wrong with the Deacon.'

The Provost's ' Huts, man, dinna sweer sae muckle!' is a kind of unconscious reminiscence of the grave reproofs of elders. The ironic technique of the traditional speech goes on functioning out of relation to its proper object.

> ' " What's that your're burying your nose in now?" and if she faltered " It's the Bible," " Hi " he would laugh, " you're turning godly in your auld age. Weel, I'm no saying but it's time!" '

The skeleton of Presbyterianism can seem terribly forbidding:

> ' Heavy Biblical pictures, in frames of gleaming black like the splinters of a hearse, were hung against a dark ground.'

There being no longer a community holding together and controlling its members, the sheer individual, Gourlay, of peasant stock, stupid, but of tremendous dourness and brute force of ' character ' thrusts upward. He builds the House with the Green Shutters on the top of the hill. It represents his attempt at self-sufficiency—the house apart. ' It is his character in stone and lime,' and it dominates the town. Since the public opinion—as represented by the ' bodies '—is important to control him the malevolence of the ' bodies ' grows monstrous against him. With shakes of the head they judge Gourlay's house as Vanity and ' Pride that *will* have a downcome.' But the traditional judgment loses most of its force from being made the vehicle of their petty personal spite.

Gourlay maintains his position till the advent of another individual—Wilson—who although a native of Barbie has been —significantly—*away* for an interval of years.

> ' In his appearance there was an air of dirty and pretentious well-to-do-ness. It was not shabby gentility. It was like the gross attempt to dress of your well-to-do publican.'

He introduces the familiar modern business methods. (They are described in some detail in Chapters X, XI and XIII).

> ' Now the shops of Barbie (the drunken man's shop and the dirty man's shop always excepted, of course) had usually been low-browed little places with faded black scrolls above the door, on which you might read in dim gilt letters (or it might be white)
>
> " Licens'd To Sell Tea & Tobacco."
>
> ' When you mounted two steps and open the door, a bell of some kind went in the interior, and an old woman in a mutch, with big specs slipping down her nose, would come up a step from a dim little room behind, and wiping her sunken mouth with her apron—she had just left her tea—would say, " What's your wull the day, Sir?" and if you said your " wull "

was tobacco, she would answer, "Ou, sir, I dinna sell ocht now but the tape and the sweeties," And then you went away, sadly.

'With the exception of the dirty man's shop, and the drunken man's shop, that kind of shop was the Barbie kind of shop. But Wilson changed all that.'

Gourlay, although a type of the individualism which both followed from and contributed to the break-up of the Scottish community, is himself thoroughly Scottish. Wilson is no longer Scottish but nondescript modern commercialism and 'progress.'

The downfall of the Gourlay family gains in significance from being a particular instance of a more general downfall. The house of Gourlay looks well enough from the outside and in its yard—

'A cock pigeon strutted round, puffing his gleaming breast and *rooketty-cooing* in the sun. Large, clear drops fell slowly from the spout of a wooden pump, and splashed upon a flat stone'—

but inside it is in filthy disorder for Gourlay has a sluttish wife and his son and daughter are ailing in mind and in body ; the fruit of Gourlay's pride is internally rotten. Gourlay's attempt to found a self-contained house and family dominating Barbie has to come to nothing sooner or later in any case, for young Gourlay, his son and heir, is a 'weakling.' Yet we are shown clearly enough that brought up in more favourable conditions there is sufficient in young Gourlay to have brought forth some fruit. He is gifted with a wealth of sensuous perceptiveness represented in passages of a prose that in this respect reminds one oddly of Katherine Mansfield's.

But as young Gourlay's schoolmaster and, later, his professor perceive, he is without the mind and character to use this wealth so as to make it something other than an incubus. The difficulties of the sensitive adolescent Scot are dealt with in a way that seems to anticipate what *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* does for the Irish adolescent. In the case of the adolescent Scot there is almost no tradition, no sympathetic understanding community to guide him ; prematurely born, he is subjected only to the brutal will of his father and the weak indulgence of his mother. Not

that the novelist attempts to invoke our sympathy for him. He is dealt with as unsympathetically as almost everyone else in the book. It is part of the bracing effect of the book that it is almost wholly unsympathetic. Douglas is a stringent moralist, scrupulous searching our moral failure. As a moralist he is perhaps too *explicit* for a novelist. But as that is not a fault of much modern work it is almost to be welcomed here as a sign of health than otherwise. A moral preoccupation in the finest sense of ' moral ' may be held to be an essential for a novelist, perhaps for any artist.

Young Gourlay is sent to Edinburgh University to be made into a minister. ' " Eh, but it's a grand thing a gude education! You may rise to be a minister," his mother had said when he was sent to the secondary school. " It's a' he's fit for " his father had growled.' Old Gourlay has no illusions as to the sacred profession. He wants to put his son into it as an expedient for saving the falling fortunes of his house. At this point then the focus is shifted from a small rural burgh to the very capital of Scotland itself and to what might be expected to be the centre of its cultural life, Edinburgh University. Young Gourlay at Edinburgh is partly a test of what Edinburgh and its university have to offer. It might not have been too much to expect that here if anywhere the youth might have found the conditions lacking in Barbie favourable for the multiplication of his single talent. Douglas's picture of Edinburgh and its university is no flattering one. Edinburgh offers the ' weakling ' only too much encouragement in his suicidal tendency to whiskey-addiction. The lecture rooms, where as one of a mob of rowdy students he has his sole opportunity of confronting his professor, are twice presented in the condition of a bear-garden. ' Auld Tam,' the Scots professor, is indeed a figure to be reckoned with. He is representative of the Scots professor of the days before Scots professors were mostly Englishmen from Oxford and Cambridge, and he possesses powers of mind and character (he quells the unruly students with the humorous acerbity of his tongue) which we are bound to respect. Being also a representative of the tradition of philosophy and abstract speculation which we associate more especially with the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century, he is in general amusingly inadequate when attempting to deal with something so concrete

and particular as literature. What effective culture there might seem still to be in Edinburgh is represented by the Allan circle. There seems to me a serious weakness betrayed by Douglas in his portrayal of this circle (Chapter XVII). The novelist seems to accept it almost at its own valuation. If, as appears, Douglas intends it to be regarded as really ' brilliant,' he does not succeed in convincingly representing it as such. Could it have been that Douglas, in general so without illusions, was himself impressed by the sort of thing represented by Tarmillan, the most ' brilliant ' apparently of the Allan circle? The superficial, even vulgar, cleverness of the wit of Tarmillan's conversation is something sadly inferior to the corresponding thing there is reason to believe there was in the Edinburgh of the eighteenth century. ' The Howff '—the pub which night after night lures young Gourlay to it out of his dismal room and away from his uncongenial books—represents what had become of the tradition to which at an earlier phase Burns's poetry belongs. It is a survival from the older Scotland ; as is the groset-fair and such an episode (and such a vocabulary) as the following:

> ' They roared and sang till it was a perfect affront to God's day, and frae sidie to sidie they swung till the splash-brods were skreighing on the wheels. At a quick turn o' the road they wintled owre ; and there they were, sitting on their doups in the atoms o' the gig, and glowering frae them!'

But for young Gourlay ' the Howff ' is no longer an expression of the robust enjoyment of bucolic life ; it is merely a refuge to shrink into from the terrors that assail his sensitivity. The novel ends, inevitably, on the notes of Insanity, Disease, Murder, Suicide. The tendency is not only in young Gourlay ; it is in the whole of the society of which the novel is a grim representation. This seems to me the nature of the tragedy of the novel, by virtue of which it may prove permanently applicable.

What is to be one's final word on the book as a contribution to literature? The quality of a novel is of course that of its prose both locally and as a cumulative organic whole. The passages extracted above give a fair idea of Douglas's prose at its working best. The purple patch about the thunderstorm at young Gourlay's birth (Chapter VI) might be extracted, together with its echo

later (Chapter XIV) that so terrified the truant boy, if the comparison with *Wuthering Heights* is to be insisted on. But Douglas's prose is not always so good. At times it appears insufficiently controlled—emotions ' seethe ' and ' boil '—and on the other hand, while frequently exhibiting a rich particularity, it occasionally drops into something like the journalist being ' literary.' That the book was Douglas's first (and only) novel may explain its immaturities, as its astonishing power may seem to have offered great promise of future achievement ; but it's not easy to believe that the life of a journalist in London would have qualified him to write a greater Scottish novel ; and in any case considerations of what he might have done ought not to deflect the critical judgment on what he did do. That Douglas's prose should so consistently preclude sympathy is of course its unusual strength. If that unsympathy could have been converted into a purely artistic detachment and sustained as such the novel would have been a great work of art. Unfortunately, as an examination of its prose at once confirms, the unsympathy is not always that of detached and seriously poised art, but seems at times to proceed from an unresolved personal animus. There is not space to extract the opening passage of the book for examination, but I may perhaps refer to it. It is Douglas's prose at its best, but even here the ' silly ' of ' The silly *tee-hee* echoed up the street ' is perhaps a sign of this insecurity. There may be some justice also in the common dismissal of the book as ' merely depressing.' Douglas does indeed refer to certain positives in at least one place—

> ' To bring a beaten and degraded look into a man's face . . . is an outrage on the decency of life, an offence to natural religion, a violation of the human sanctities '

—but these positives, though referred to, are nowhere strongly and positively realized in the book. If they had been it would perhaps have been a wiser, because more complete, book. Nevertheless if not a great novel it is because of the clarity of the social criticism it implies, a very remarkable one, perhaps the only very remarkable Scottish novel, not excepting the earlier Scottish novels of Walter Scott and John Galt.

JOHN SPEIRS.

# RUTH ADAM AGAIN

*THERE NEEDS NO GHOST, by Ruth Adam (Chapman and Hall, 7/6).*

This is inferior to the previous novel of this author reviewed in *Scrutiny*. No wonder, seeing it is about the effects of the Munich crisis on Bloomsbury Bohemians and English villagers and came out before Christmas. Apart from being less well written and of a piece than *I'm Not Complaining*, Mrs. (not Miss as previously stated in these pages) Adam is less successful in her choice of her chief mouthpiece—the Vicar's sister, though the last drop of juice is wrung out of her, is a bit too limited to have so much rope and her style of thought a bit Loosish to enjoy for long. The other chronicler, the Bloomsbury young woman, is first-rate in the line of the recounter of *I'm Not Complaining*. With all these reservations, the book is good entertainment literature and something over. There is some good back-chat between the Bohemians, an acute account of the emotions set up in complicated people by the Czech affair, and a more than acute display of the process by which the artificial, *i.e.*, mental, values of Bloomsbury give way, in a village environment and in face of the realities of life, to the real values which tradition has found for a class of people who could never have afforded the luxury of artificial ones. Exposure of false values is always Mrs. Adam's strong suit. She is also masterly here in demonstrating the ineffectiveness of simple goodness in grappling with the political scene as well as the unexpected strength of the *anima naturaliter christiana* in personal relations. I for one consider a novel by Mrs. Adam, who has a point of view, a lively feeling for Character as well as for characters, and a personal sense of values, far more worth having than a sackful of art-novels (for instance, those of Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Miss Kay Boyle). Mrs. Adam remains a novelist not only to read but to watch.

Q.D.L.

# SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

*APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE, by D. A. Traversi (Sands : the Paladin Press, 6/-).*

This is not quite the book one was expecting from Mr. Traversi. It is extremely ambitious, and at the same time, as the author admits, painfully compressed. It sets out to give a general account of Shakespeare's development: ' Proceeding from the written word and the verse to the greater complexities of which they form a part, we may hope to contribute something to a general picture of the Shakespearean experience.' Such an undertaking could only be adequately carried out in a series of detailed studies of all the major plays on the scale at least of Mr. Traversi's previously published essays on *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Those who have read and admired these careful and sensitive analyses will be disappointed to find that the *Troilus* essay has been truncated to fit a small book, while that on *Coriolanus*, perhaps the best of the three, does not appear at all. The space gained is given up to short accounts of other plays. All these are suggestive and valuable, but in the nature of the case none can pretend to anything like completeness. For criticism which sets out to work from analysis of the poet's language to a comprehensive account of the total experience communicated to the qualified reader needs above all space to show by copious illustration how themes are developed, actions judged, and attitudes to the characters made clear in the tone and texture of the verse. If this kind of analysis is not sufficiently full to be completely convincing, it is apt to leave, at worst, an impression of futile niggling, at best, a sense that it is fragmentary and one-sided.

All the same, this book makes a genuine contribution to Shakespeare criticism: it has the elementary but rare merit of concentrating throughout on what Shakespeare wrote. Mr. Traversi sees Shakespeare's development as a progress from plays whose unity is mainly imposed by the plot to plays in which every part of the material is worked into the expression of a unified and complete imaginative experience. To do the book full justice it would be necessary to consider each piece of analysis

separately and in detail: in a short review I can only attempt a rough discrimination. The best sections are those on *Troilus* and *The Winter's Tale*. Following Mr. Wilson Knight's description of the symbolism of the Trojan and Greek camps in *Troilus*, Mr. Traversi nevertheless corrects his sentimental view of the sordid conclusion and of the character of Pandarus. He regards the play as an expression of intense experiences not ordered into a coherent whole, and shows how this may be deduced from the instability of the verse. The effect of imagery of taste in conveying the insubstantiality of Troilus' love is well brought out. The essay on *The Winter's Tale*, reprinted almost in its entirety, is the most valuable and original in the book. It shows a sensitive appreciation of the symbolic technique of the last plays, and elucidates the main theme here—' the divisions created in love and friendship by the passage of Time and the action of ' blood,' and the healing of these divisions '—by a delicate and convincing analysis of key passages. It is a pity that the account of the pastoral scene omits the earlier comments on Florizel's speech (IV, iii, 135). On *Othello* and *Macbeth* Mr. Traversi follows, in the main, the conclusions of Mr. Leavis and Mr. Knights: he describes these plays as separating out from the confusion and uncertainty of the ' problem plays ' ' the decisive orientation of Shakespearean good and evil.'

On *Lear* and *Antony* he is less satisfactory. The analysis of the reconciliation and restoration scenes in *Lear* as balancing the purgatorial suffering entailed by the original division and disruption carries conviction, but it seems to me rather shirking the problem to say that because the ending appears to nullify the previous poetic harmony the play is not an artistic whole. Mr. Traversi suggests the comparison with *Timon*, where the mood of disgust is opposed to all order or control, but at least the problem needs more extended consideration than this brief dismissal. In *Antony and Cleopatra* I think he is right in stressing the powerful associations of generosity, fertility and even immortality in the later scenes, but a much fuller analysis would be needed to establish satisfactorily his main contention that Antony's love is justified in terms of its intensity and vitality in spite of his obvious weaknesses. The section on *Hamlet* relates it to *Troilus* as a play of frustration not entirely coherent as a work of art, but several aspects of the play

are left out of account. It seems to me misleading to imply that there is no solution to the moral problems of *Measure for Measure*, and I think the function of the Duke is less uncertain than Mr. Traversi suggests. The seven pages on the sonnets are hardly sufficient for an adequate discussion of the growth of Shakespeare's interest in the action of Time. And surely *Henry IV, Part II* is not such an organic unity that one can say with assurance that the rejection of Falstaff implies a relation of all the divisions of the play to ' a developing split in Shakespeare's feeling '?

This last remark raises a point that may cause some confusion. Without involving himself in a discussion of the theory of artistic creation, Mr. Traversi might in some places have made it clearer whether he is referring to Shakespeare's own personal experience or to the experience which the qualified reader receives from the work of art. (See, for instance, the sentence quoted at the beginning of this review). It is a question of clarifying the argument and avoiding possible misunderstandings.

The last chapter draws some tentative conclusions as to Shakespeare's preoccupations in his mature work with the action of Time and the two elements of experience which may be called roughly ' sense ' and ' reason.' I feel that these only explain certain aspects of the plays, and are not quite the master-keys for which Mr. Traversi presents them. But the critic who could do justice to Shakespeare's work as a whole has not yet appeared, and in case I have over-stressed the points on which this book seems to me open to objections, I hasten to say that it remains one of the few valuable aids to an understanding of Shakespeare that have appeared in recent years.

R. G. Cox.

# EDUCATIONAL

*EDUCATION AND SOCIETY, by E. G. Biaggini (Hutchison, 4/6).*

All who are interested genuinely in the teaching of English, as distinct from cramming for School Certificate, must, by now, be familiar with Mr. Biaggini's work. His previous book, *The Reading and Writing of English,* combined sound critical intelligence with a knowledge of the practical difficulties of teaching, which is too frequently missing from books of this type. His exercises and methods are applicable below Sixth Form standard, and by using them I have obtained some interesting results from a Fourth Form (average age, fourteen to fifteen) on the supposedly more backward side of a Lancashire secondary school, where intelligence is by no means above the average.

The present work is concerned mainly with adult education, but the exercises contained in it could be used profitably in secondary schools. They are intended to test the student's reaction to the general environment, by asking his response to such words as ' citizenship,' ' personality,' and ' right-thinking,' by testing his ability to distinguish between sense and nonsense (many students were incapable even of this), sincerity and claptrap, and even by examining his sense of humour. Even in such a risky proceeding as this last, Mr. Biaggini never becomes pedantic or dogmatic.

In the last half of the book Mr. Biaggini puts forward his own ideas on the relation of education to society, and on the methods of counteracting the appallingly complacent Philistinism of the contemporary world. If we do not find these chapters as interesting as the author's practical work, it is not because there is much exceptionable in his arguments, but rather because they are already familiar to us and when we have read them we feel no nearer to the solution of our difficulties.

F. CHAPMAN.

# RIMBAUD

*LE LYRISME DE RIMBAUD, by C. A. Hackett (Librairie Nizet et Bastard, 35f.).*

'He is a poet of whom there can only be interpretations,' Charles Du Bos once said of Rimbaud. Rimbaud is one of the most difficult of modern poets and the difficulty has been greatly increased by the tendency of his critics to take sides, to use his poetry to support a particular creed or a particular party. It is one of the virtues of Dr. Hackett's study, which is a Paris doctorate thesis, that it is solidly based on the text of Rimbaud's poetry; and though it is difficult to accept some of his conclusions, his book is an interesting piece of exegesis which is particularly welcome in the present state of Rimbaud criticism.

The scope of the book is a good deal wider than the title suggests. It is not confined to one aspect of Rimbaud's poetry, but covers the whole field of his work. Dr. Hackett says excellently of his *lyrisme*

> 'Ses visions sont saisies au moment où elles apparaissent dans sa conscience: les mots sont comme forgés sur place en réponse à un besoin pressant, immédiat . . . '

Again:

> 'Sa vision est si intense, si personnelle, que tous les intermédiaires sont supprimés et que les images subissent une sorte de télescopage.'

He goes on to discuss the connection between Rimbaud's style and the sources of his inspiration. A large part of the book is devoted to an examination of his imagery and the elucidation of the symbols of the mother, birth, death, water and the *auberge verte*; and there is an interesting examination of *Voyelles* and *Les Effarés*.

Dr. Hackett is perhaps inclined to push the Freudian interpretation too far. Commenting on Rimbaud's desire to be an *être intact*, he writes:

> 'Pour sa part, il se dit sans mère, ou il s'imagine né miraculeusement d'une mère-vierge.'

The identification—surely arbitrary—of the rainbow with the umbilical cord leads him to discover a curious and sinister meaning in the line

' J'avais été damné par l'arc-en-ciel '

which is probably merely an instance of the poet's strange fantasy. The danger of this method is that it sometimes allows ' the problem of Rimbaud ' to obscure the poet. When, for example, Dr. Hackett observes

> ' Le poète devient " malade à mourir " et se tue pour expier le crime d'être né, d'avoir ainsi violé la pureté de cette mère qu'il aurait voulue vierge, et qui a inspiré tout son lyrisme '

he puts the emphasis in the wrong place. For ultimately it must fall not on what Rimbaud failed to do or his attitude towards his mother, but on the splendour of the poetry which was in fact written.

The discussion of Rimbaud's ' vision ' and ' hallucination ' strikes me as inconclusive. In a very interesting comment on the significance of clocks in his poetry, Dr. Hackett says:

> ' L'horloge qui se fait entendre à travers son œuvre est comme la césure du drame spirituel ; elle signale le moment où, l'esprit en suspens, on passe de l'hallucination à l'illumination.'

Unfortunately, however, he does not provide any satisfactory definition of the two states, and the nature of Rimbaud's central experience remains obscure.

Once a critic begins to interpret symbols, he passes lightly and probably unconsciously to the assumption that *all* symbols are capable of explanation.

> ' Il est frappant de remarquer (writes Dr. Hackett) que toutes les visions hallucinatoires nous ramènent à cette idée de repos et de fuite dans un endroit fermé, dangereux et protecteur à la fois pour le petit enfant.'

This is one aspect of Rimbaud's poetry, but it is only one. His poetry cannot be reduced to complete uniformity or even to complete coherence. It is full of disparate elements ; ' vision ' and ' hallucination ' alternate until no one—least of all the poet himself

—can decide with any certainty which is vision and which is hallucination. Some of the symbols can be explained, but others remain hopelessly obscure and others still, perhaps, have no meaning. It is after all part of Rimbaud's greatness that his work contains a refractory element which makes complete symmetry impossible.

The conclusion seems to be that Rimbaud's poetry and his life alike were a tragedy of non-adaptation. Dr. Hackett speaks of his ' constant flight from a true illumination ' and quotes with approval M. Carré's summing-up of the relations between mother and son:

> ' La mère de Rimbaud lut le volume [*Une saison en enfer*] et n'y comprit rien. C'était pourtant la preuve éclatante de son triomphe: elle avait vaincu son fils, Rimbaud avait tué les chimères.'

If Dr. Hackett and M. Carré are right, Rimbaud's ' flight ' to Africa represents a complete compromise with the bourgeois respectability of his mother. But does not this interpretation overlook the *tone* of the superb closing sections of the *Saison en enfer*? Rimbaud had clearly made up his mind that his visions were hallucinations and had decided to return to ' rugged reality ' ; but this does not mean that he had been ' vanquished ' by his mother. The poetry seems to me to lead logically to a new start and he certainly expected to find some sort of fulfilment in Africa. The fact that it was a life of complete disillusionment merely brings us back to Rivière's theory that he was separated from us *d'une manière constitutionnelle*. Rimbaud's poetry is proof of the supreme difficulty of preserving one's human integrity in a world like our own. The fault was not with Rimbaud, but with his world ; and the courage and integrity with which he faced a tragic situation makes his work a landmark in the spiritual history of our time.

MARTIN TURNELL.

# MALLARMÉ: LIFE AND ART

*MALLARMÉ, by Kurt Wais (C. H. Beck, Munich).*

I.

In his commentary to Roger Fry's translations from Mallarmé, published in 1936, M. Mauron regretted that ' a good biography, human as well as literary, is still to come.' Herr Wais's is at least comprehensive: it covers the little-known early years as well as the later, and comments not only on the poetry but the prose. This is often impressive, and at times as difficult as the poetry.

Mallarmé has been celebrated as a *poète absolu*, a biography of whom would be superfluous if not impertinent. M. Thibaudet, for example, wrote a *Critical Study* which confines itself to remarks upon style and metre, and to a sort of philosophical exegesis ; as though the poet were interested only in general ideas and their relations. On the other hand M. Mauron seems to have expected that biography, at least in its post-Freudian sense, should oust criticism altogether: ' All that is not art should become science '—I quote from memory but preserve, I think, his meaning—' and the only way to avoid gossip is for æsthetic to become a branch of psychology.'

The attempts at psychological criticism which have been published during the last few years are perhaps sufficient of themselves, if not to refute M. Mauron, at least to cast a doubt on his opinion. The more psychological they have been, the less their immediate importance for æsthetic ; while their remote importance has been either problematical or fairly obviously nil. I do not know whether it is not clear on reflection that this was likely to happen. For the psychologist who turns to æsthetic, a poem can be neither more nor less than a datum: the more he advances in his work, the more he leaves the poem behind ; while if he hopes either to discover or to complete it, he is ignorant of what a poem should be. Many psychological critics—and anthropological and sociological critics, the same judgment applies to all—have been of the second kind. They have been in search of an experience which they felt they lacked ; whilst the lack of it meant that the search was misconceived.

The exhaustive division of intellectual activities into art and science is too neat to commend itself either to common sense, or to the tradition of humanity. Even science, according to Aristotle, needs to be discussed by the non-expert and in the light of non-scientific opinions ; otherwise it remains unprofitably independent of the rest of human concerns. As this discussion cannot be wholly methodical, in the last resort it must be controlled by native or acquired tact, and M. Mauron is free to call it gossip if he likes ; but if so, he is prevented from condemning the whole of gossip as useless. It seems yet more probable that a work of art stands in need of the same sort of discussion. To extract an adequate and helpful sense from a poem, we need to be aware of at least some of the subtleties of its language ; and we can do so, only if we are not totally ignorant of the poet's surroundings, material as well as intellectual. This view is familiar ; and it seems possible to cite in its support not only Herr Wais, by whom it is proclaimed, but also M. Thibaudet, by whom it is denied.

In spite of his protestations, M. Thibaudet found it impossible wholly to neglect biography. The poet whose sole interest lies in general ideas cannot be conceived ; they come to him on particular occasions, and these are his only reason or excuse for handling the ideas. Determined not to lift his eyes from the text, M. Thibaudet of necessity found occasions within it ; concluding that Mallarmé had to face, or chose to deal, only with the problems of a writer. The poems, he said, are about the writing of poetry ; that is, their subject is themselves. This account has usually been held to be somewhat tenuous, even by favourable judges ; Herr Wais, who considers Mallarmé as a man who not only wrote but had more pressing if not more important tasks, comes perhaps very near to showing that it is mistaken. At any rate it is interesting to place his account of a poem side by side with M. Thibaudet's : and if no one but a Frenchman may finally decide between them, Englishmen are entitled (and indeed, for their own purposes compelled) to come to a sort of provisional decision.

## II.

But as Herr Wais himself is not French, this problem of foreign poetry should perhaps first be considered. If criticism is a discussion which, as has been suggested, is guided ultimately

by tact, the foreigner is necessarily at a disadvantage. His ' feelings ' for the subtleties of language cannot be so fine or so reliable as the native's. This has usually been recognized ; but not so usually perhaps, that the disadvantage is greater now than ever before. For the first time in the history of civilized Europe, the nations not only express themselves, but receive their intellectual and a great part of their emotional training, each in a different tongue. They no longer have a large and common share in the classics, nor do they acknowledge a single modern tongue as culturally supreme, as at one time the Italian and later the French. Communication has become extremely difficult, and perfect communication perhaps impossible ; it may take place from time to time, but is interrupted by an uncertain number of blunders.

To preserve what is left it seems necessary to run the risk of blunders ; which may themselves, when put on record, have a value—for they give information, if not that which was intended ; and invite their own correction. My desire is not wholly, though it is partly, to provide myself with defence for writing in English: but to make clear if I can that while Herr Wais, it seems to me, has written a valuable book about a French poet, it is also a German book. The proportion in which it is the one or the other is difficult to judge, at least on a single reading ; it is the first in a high proportion, and cannot as such be neglected: but it is not wholly the first, and the English reader will be struck with this.

Herr Wais's Mallarmé appears to live in Weimar of the first Grand-duke as well as in Paris of the Third Republic. He is described in phrases which have about them something it might be unfair to call unction, but for which it is difficult to find another appropriate term. It might perhaps be said that Herr Wais writes, if not to edify as well as to instruct, at least as though edification were the necessary consequence of instruction. This formidible optimism is, I think, a note of Weimar rather than of Paris.

As words are important, it may perhaps illustrate what I mean that, where Mallarmé talks of *la femme*, Herr Wais (but what could he else?) talks of *die Frau*. And the sonnet *Tristesse d'Eté* (*O lutteuse endormie* . . . ) he glosses: ' Mallarmé has been reading too much Baudelaire, and cannot believe that the woman's —*des Maedchens*—sorrow is genuine or that her tears are more

than a mere pretence.' But the text, so far as I can see, gives not the slightest ground for this assumption, nor has the assumption the slightest relevance to the text. The man and the woman do not satisfy each other, nor is there any means short of the most fantastic by which they may be satisfied. Herr Wais has perhaps been reading too much Goethe and misinterprets in the interests of what, on Weimarian principles, cannot fail to satisfy—das Ewig-weibliche.

A second disadvantage of Herr Wais, at least in so far as he writes for the general reader, should perhaps be mentioned. He is an academic, with the academic's hospitality to almost anything in verse or prose. He quotes much French and Spanish that seems hardly likely to be of use ; and references to, say, James Branch Cabell are almost certainly a hindrance rather than a help. So too are references to Poe or to the more banal Keats, unless a clear distinction is drawn between any influence they may have had on the writer and that to which the reader is expected to submit. Since M. Valéry took the Anglo-Saxon world to task for its neglect, the continental reputation of Poe has grown almost to a menace. The truth would seem to be that Poe, if a gifted being, failed to find or to profit by an intellectual discipline ; of which his gifts stood peculiarly in need, so that without it they were wasted.

## III.

In the *Après-Midi* the faun wakes up from a dream of nymphs, whom he proposes to perpetuate in song. But after only six verses, and abruptly in the seventh, he turns to meditation:

> . . . Inerte, tout brûle dans l'heure fauve
> Sans marquer par quel art ensemble détala
> Trop d'hymen souhaité de qui cherche le *la*:
> Alors m'éveillerai-je à la ferveur première,
> Droit et seul, sous un flot antique de lumière,
> Lys! et l'un de vous tous pour l'ingénuité.

Although this break is emphasized by a change of type and by the closing of quotation marks, M. Thibaudet appears to overlook it. The above lines he glosses as though they continued the song, and expressed the faun's approval of it: ' Rien, autour, que l'heure

fauve de midi, rien qui rappelle la belle vision. Mais il suffit, pour tout récréer, que s'érige le lys musical de la Syrinx.' But if music suffices for this purpose, it is not clear why it should have been abandoned.

There follow almost immediately the well-known lines:

> Mon sein, vierge de preuve, atteste une morsure
> Mystérieuse, due a quelque auguste dent ;
> Mais, bast! arcane tel élut pour confident
> Le jonc vaste et jumeau dont sous l'azur on joue:
> Qui, détournant à soi le trouble de la joue
> Rêve, dans un solo long, que nous amusions
> La beauté d'alentour par des confusions
> Fausses entre elle-même et notre chant crédule ;
> Et de faire aussi haut que l'amour se module
> Evanouir du songe ordinaire de dos
> Ou de flanc pur suivis avec mes regards clos,
> Une vaine, sonore et monotone ligne.

According to M. Thibaudet, these give Mallarmé's views on the nature of music and poetry ; and the faun's views too, for he is Mallarmé's mouthpiece. Poetry, containing within itself the essence of all objects of desire, is a world where its devotees rest in a state of complete satisfaction. ' Ligne de musique qui résume la chair ainsi que la ligne des horizons résume les paysages,—ligne exhalée du lys et du jonc, et qui, s'étalant droite, le répète comme dans la dimension inverse.' The flute, says M. Thibaudet, taking up a figure which will be quoted later, is an ' instrument des fuites, fuites vers la beauté intérieure qui fait mieux que consoler, qui couronne et qui achève . . . '

The faun however, who has this instrument of consolation and consummation within his grasp, not only chooses to lay it down but announces that he does so. Compelled to seek an explanation for this, M. Thibaudet suggests that the faun is ' plus impatient de vivre.' But the flute, he has told us, is the sole means to the fullest possible life: and the faun therefore is either ignorant or inconsequent or abstemious in his actions. M. Thibaudet would deny he is the first or the last ; the second we do not expect from Mallarmé.

These and similar difficulties can be avoided if, with Herr Wais, we adhere more closely to the text. Taking it up at the point to which M. Thibaudet has brought us, we see that the faun does not merely lay down the flute but mocks it ; and that he regards Syrinx, the goddess of the flute, as the opposite of beneficent:

> Tâche donc, instrument des fuites, ô maligne
> Syrinx, de refleurir aux lacs où tu m'attends!

Tâche de refleurir . . . but the flute cannot, for it has been cut from a reed ; and is now being reminded that, though it claims to confer benefits upon the player, there is an important benefit which it cannot confer upon itself. Similarly, looking back over the longer quotation, we see that while the faun acknowledges the dignity of poetry (the tooth with which she has branded him is *auguste*), he is rebelling against rather than rejoicing in her power. From the flute she produces no more than a *chant crédule* ; and to identify this song with the surrounding beauty, or to find the essence of that beauty in the song, is only a *confusion fausse*. Or so it seems to the faun who contrasts with the coolness and calm of poetry, the heat of which he is aware in the landscape outside, and the heat of his passion within.

And this contrast is why, in the first quotation, he breaks off his song when it is scarcely begun. He does so with marked impatience, at the third syllable of a line. The satisfaction craved by excited senses is very different from that of a musician who finds the A among his stops (Herr Wais is no doubt right that here there is a note of contempt). Therefore he will yield himself to the *ferveur première*, and parade in the pagan sunlight ingenuous as the lily. This is the last of M. Thibaudet's misconceptions: the lily and the reed are not, as he thinks, two symbols for the same thing or two names for the same symbol ; rather they are opposed, the one representing primitive passion as it appears to the faun, the other the art to which he prefers it.

I have quoted this passage at length not only as an example of Herr Wais's eye and care for detail, of which there are perhaps more striking examples ; but to illustrate the importance of this care for judgment on the complete poem. M. Thibaudet's faun continues to behave as inconsequently as he has begun, for there

is nothing else that he can do. Having laid down the flute for no apparent reason, he fails for no apparent reason to find satisfaction in the reveries to which he turns. But that does not distress him greatly, or indeed at all: his afternoon has been one of both ' mensonge et beauté,' and he asks for nothing more than to repeat it. Wine and sleep will prepare him to dally with visions once more: ' ainsi,' says M. Thibaudet, ' le dernier vers reprend le motif du premier . . . et, comme en des volutes indéfinies, reprend le même cycle de songes.' If poetry, the highest elaboration of life, can be exchanged without regret for life in its crudity, then the major distinction which the poem establishes is seen to be no distinction at all ; and when it has collapsed, no others can be maintained. During the faun's afternoon one thing succeeds another thing in any order and without any significance in the succession ; for all things are the same. While therefore the poem never progresses, there is no reason why it ever should end. The music of its words, which alone sustains interest, returns upon and produces itself like an arabesque:

Une vaine, sonore et monotone ligne.

There is, perhaps, a beauty of this kind, but it is not usually rated very high.

According to Herr Wais on the other hand the poem consists not of one element but of two ; and not in an indefinite number of repetitions but in a conflict, receiving thence a determinate form and length. Though dedicated to poetry the faun renounces it ; he suffers in consequence of the renunciation, for poetry is a necessity to him. His reveries after laying down the flute are of the morose kind which, by keeping lust alive when its satisfaction is physically or morally impossible, end by reducing all life to lust. In imagination he re-enacts amorous adventures:

O nymphes, *regonflons* ces souvenirs divers.

He abducted a brace of nymphs, one of whom at least gave promise of serving as accomplice ; but he had neither the strength nor the skill of a god, and both escaped.

Tant pis! vers le bonheur d'autres m'entraîneront!

He will establish his equality with the gods by an attempt on Venus herself:

A l'heure où ce bois d'or et de cendres se teinte
Une fête s'exalte en la feuillée éteinte:
Etna! c'est parmi toi visité de Vénus
Sur ta lave posant ses talons ingénus,
Quand tonne un somme triste ou s'épuise la flamme.
Je tiens la reine!

But lust has stirred his imagination so deeply as to ensure its own defeat, and the light shed by divine beauty shows at last the depths to which he has descended. There is nothing now in common between himself and Venus:

. . . O sûr châtiment!

Unlike the lily which is not dedicated to poetry, he has nothing to commend him merely as a creature of the *ferveur première*.

In spite of remorse he must continue with ordinary living:

Sans plus il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème.

But this he finds impossible, and has recourse to wine. The sun which maddened him to a frenzy must now, through the grapes it has ripened, sink him in oblivion. This is all he can hope for: so far from having perpetuated the nymphs he has both lost them, and is driven to lose himself.

## IV.

Herr Wais's commentary, I think it might be said, gives to the *Après-Midi* not only a shape but one which, in the terms of painting, is not abstract but representative: it recalls a part of experience, and the weight of experience is directly associated with it:

Sans plus il faut dormir en l'oubli du blasphème.

Writing in this manner Mallarmé was no mere producer of *l'art pour l'art*; and Herr Wais goes so far as to claim that, first of his generation, he overcame the 'fruitless opposition' between *l'art pour l'art* and the *pièce à thèse*. He did not do so without a struggle, persistence in which both required and perfected a remarkable dignity of character. This deeply impressed his contemporaries, having an immediate influence perhaps greater than that of the poems. For Herr Wais also Mallarmé is eminent not only

as a poet, but as a sort of poet-hero.

The detail of this portrait needs no doubt to be examined, and it cannot be accepted without reserve ; in its main lines, however, it is I think more acceptable than the one which is customary. They seem to be sanctioned by the history of literature in general, on which the ' mere artist ' has had little influence, and in particular of literature during the last fifty years. As I said, Herr Wais's book cannot be neglected, and he has done a great service in writing it.

Nevertheless my feeling when I put it down is not so much that a problem has been solved ; as that merely apparent problems have been swept away, and for the first time the real one revealed. If Mallarmé rejected *l'art pour l'art*, how did he come to incur so deep a suspicion of being devoted to it? A suspicion not without its grounds ; which Herr Wais, if he makes them seem less extensive, cannot cause to disappear entirely. The interpretation he gives of some of the later poems, though possible, is no more than plausible ; and a more obvious interpretation remains, on which they are very nearly webs of words without, or with a deliberately confused, reference to things. If Herr Wais's interpretations are accepted it is only in deference to his general argument ; to which they continue a source of weakness, rather than of strength. Then there is the heroic quality which he vaunts in Mallarmé : the term is not wholly misleading, but fairly obviously it is being used in a not very usual sense. Mallarmé, it seems true, was neither unaware of nor indifferent to the dangers which threatened contemporary society ; but this only makes it more rather than less difficult to approve the limited attention which he paid them. The time which was thus left free he devoted to pursuits normally held to be the reverse of heroic : the editorship of *La Dernière Mode*, for example, in which he answered fashion-ridden correspondents as obsequiously if not as crassly as Arnold Bennett. This last Herr Wais takes as a mark of respect for woman, as part of a *Lob der Frau* ; but presumably one needs to be deeply dyed in Weimarism to do so.

Some of the better-known poems may give hints towards a solution of the problem. The struggle between the ideal and the real, between the human passions which are the material and the harmony which is the form of a work of art, is not so much

composed as, once having been acknowledged, avoided ; or a composition, if arrived at, is only at the sacrifice of a great part of the material. The *Après-Midi*, for example, not only ends with the self-abdication of the faun, but the heat of his desire is so persistently connected with that of noon as no longer to appear a human phenomenon. That is, it no longer appears a moral phenomenon, of which there is any significance in saying that it ' ought not ' to be. Reader, poet and faun are reduced to hoping for the heat to pass without its causing too much distress. Venus visits Etna

Quand tonne un somme triste ou s'épuise la flamme ;

But has no power to extinguish or control the flame, which when it bursts forth must be borne with. When therefore the *Après-Midi* is considered as anything more than a specimen of *l'art pour l'art*, an unpleasantness is felt to hang about it similar to that about the *Faerie Queene*: in which the blatant beasts, though one may now and then be destroyed to mark an occasion, are on the whole accepted, if not preserved, as natural. Somewhat similarly, in *Le vierge, le vivace* . . . the swan takes up as the only possible attitude to its *exil inutile* that of a *froid mépris* ; and is content to await deliverance from a *coup d'aile ivre* of the Spring, when the course of nature brings the Spring round again. Against defeatism of this kind the *puéril triomphe* of *Victorieusement fui* does not stand out in very strong contrast:

Victorieusement fui le suicide beau
Tison de gloire, sang par écume, or, tempête!
O rire si là-bas une pourpre s'apprête
A ne tendre royal que mon absent tombeau.

Mallarmé refuses to decorate himself with the merely natural splendours of the sunset, of which suicide, or the reduction of oneself to flesh and bones, is the moral equivalent: but the only moral or human achievement of which he can boast is the possession of a woman whose hair is splendid enough to have blazed alongside the sun. He thinks it worth while to mention further about her head, that as it rests on the pillows it resembles

. . . Un casque guerrier d'impératrice enfant
Dont pour la figurer il tomberait des roses.

This is surely a frigid comparison: and the definition of frigidity is the neglect, where they would be in place, of human or moral considerations. Explicitly in *Quelle soie aux baumes du temps* Mallarmé states that, to be supremely content with his mistress, he must strangle (*étouffer*) *le cri des Gloires*, or the desire for and admiration of most varieties of human effort.

I am of course choosing my quotations, and there are other poems which are notable for their humanity. But they do not seem to touch on the struggle to which Herr Wais draws attention, and are perhaps irrelevant to a discussion of the quality which distinguishes Mallarmé.

I find the suggestion very strong that, with a sharp eye for the problem of the ideal and the real, and a scrupulousness which forbad him to overlook any of its bearings, he was yet without equipment—not to solve the problem, with which it would be invidious to reproach him—but to handle it while yet unsolved. He could not refrain from merely partial solutions which, though they satisfied him immediately, could satisfy few others but himself. Yet the problem is by no means new, and is not impossible to live with: the history of civilization is perhaps the history of very little else. It may be, however, that to do so, a firm reliance is necessary on the complex habits which have been elaborated by civilization; they alone providing strength continually to envisage both the ideal and the inadequacy of the means which for the most part are the only means to approach it. If this is true, it may to some extent serve as an explanation of Mallarmé: for he was very much the child of his century, in so far as this prided itself on the rejection of habits. To the end of his life he indulged in a schoolboy infidelity; and upon realizing that his problem could not be solved without intellectual help, he neglected to go outside his century in search of it. Antiquity and the Middle Ages had thought and written in vain: he chose to rely exclusively on the brand-new German speculations (at least they were so in France) to which his friend Villiers introduced him. *O cerveau fou d' Hegel*! said Laforgue, seeking help from the same source but rejecting it almost immediately. The seriousness and scrupulousness of Mallarmé, which raised him above Laforgue, on this occasion betrayed him: he could not trifle, and had to make the best of the help which came his way. Unfortunately he was too much

of his century to adopt the habits even of German idealists, and thought to modify these also for his own purposes. As his brain was by no means so well nourished in philosophy, he produced a *folie* which is correspondingly more striking.

This is a first impression on looking into *Igitur* and *Un Coup de Dés*, which the sympathetic account of Herr Wais has failed to modify. Intended as major works, they are ineffective almost in proportion, it seems, to their earnestness: much as would be a scheme of salvation hatched in a country chapel, by one who had hardly heard of Paul. Daily and yearly familiarity with solutions of this kind tended perhaps to blunt Mallarmé, to make him less capable of realizing the inadequacy of the *Après-Midi* and the triviality of *Victorieusement fui* ; or to put it another way, the insecurity and inexperience which forced him on the one may have forced him on the other. Maybe also the obscurity of some of the later poems results, not from an endeavour after *l'art pour l'art*, or to cut loose from the duties of a full life—this is Herr Wais's point, and it may now be allowed him—but to discharge the duties in an original way. They may be an example of speaking with tongues.

## V.

Mallarmé is distinguished by the vigour with which from time to time he asserts the existence and the claims of the ideal, of *ce qui là-haut éclate* ; and by his refusal at such times to identify the ideal with the material product not worked over by the spirit—*l'absente de tous bouquets* with the flowers of which they are composed, the human paradise with *le mirage brutal, la cité, ses gouvernements, le code*. The latter are no more than *des nécropoles*. But his own spirit was unable to work with the wisdom of experience which brings patience ; and therefore he degraded the ideal, or sought to use as a bridge to it what is a mere pebble rolling down into vacuity. It is no accident that some of his work splits up into fragments even before examination: lines, couplets are remembered while the rest vanish without a trace.

While his success within its limits is such as to make him important for all times, his success and failure together perhaps make him particularly important for us. Of what Gibbon called the ' solid fabric of human greatness ' he was able, by prodigious

effort, to seize only the greatness, and the solidarity escaped him: the solidarity has not become any easier to seize, and the greatness may altogether disappear. If his success stands as an example of what may be achieved under difficulties, his failure and the reason for it is a yet more instructive warning.

JAMES SMITH.

## BEGGARS ON HORSEBACK

*SAILOR ON HORSEBACK: The Biography of Jack London, by Irving Stone (Collins, 12/6).*

*EDGAR WALLACE, by Margaret Lane (Heineman, 10/6).*

These biographies would provide useful *Scrutiny* documentation, though probably no *Scrutiny* reader has read anything by Jack London since he was a schoolboy nor anything by Edgar Wallace unless when convalescing. Both men were born in 1875, outside wedlock and in great poverty, both made fortunes out of the writing profession and died heavily in debt in early middle-age. Both worked with incredible energy, persistence and fecundity, made fantastic sums by their writing, didn't know how to manage their lives so as to get anything out of them, and consequently got tied up in lunatic forms of expenditure whose increasing claims they wore themselves out to satisfy. The careers of both, in the waste of ability and means and potential usefulness they represent, constitute an indictment of the societies that produced them and supplied them with wealth they could only dissipate along with their talents.

Jack London was the tough little American boy who brought himself up on the San Francisco water-front and in the Alaska gold-rush; he never did grow up. He remained the victim of whiskey, feminine charm, his trust in everyone he met, the latest ideas in science, political theory and so forth, and a senselessly-manifested desire to be loved and to regenerate mankind. His biographer is an admirer and by way of being a Jack London himself; he has no standards to place him by. He thinks Jack was a great American writer and a powerful intellect. His writings however have already found their level, and his intellect was a

matter of bolting ideas without even realizing when they produced indigestion—for instance, he was an ardent life-long socialist but he also believed in the supremacy of the Nordic race and his literary idol and model was Kipling.

The success of Edgar Wallace's domestic life seems to be a tribute to the virtues of the respectable English poor by whom he was brought up. His biographer has collected interesting and valuable details about an almost extinct culture in vanished quarters. This picture contrasts with the incoherent emotional and domestic background that was all the corresponding stratum of American life had to offer little Jack London in the last century. On the other hand Edgar Wallace had none of Jack London's proletarian sympathies (once he had risen) and was not, except superficially, more sophisticated. Wallace the writer was the product of Fleet Street between the Boer War and the Great War, and he was almost nothing else but that. Jingoism and the Northcliffe outlook seem to have been instinctive in him, and a blind sense for what would catch the market enabled him sooner or later to make a fortune out of every kind of journalism right up to the West End stage thriller. He could not have done this without some real appreciation of certain aspects of his time, and his gangster play *On the Spot* is nearer to art and survival than anything that is likely to be in Jack London's fifty volumes, perhaps because his lack of ideals, his shrewd newspaperman's knowledge of character and his friendships in the criminal underworld qualified him to be the dramatist of this society. He has received more than his deserts in a biography by Miss Margaret Lane, his daughter-in-law, which is a pleasure to read. Its discrimination, its delicate comment and detachment, and its assured placing of every aspect of its subject form a pointed contrast to Mr. Stone's red-blooded hero-worship. How much better a biography turns out when written unpretentiously by an intelligent woman than when a journalist, though with infinite labour, throws together an enthusiastic mess of words about Messianic complexes and such.

Q.D.L.

# THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF MUSIC

*THE FORTY-EIGHT PRELUDES AND FUGUES OF J. S. BACH, by Cecil Gray (Oxford University Press, 8/6).*

*BEETHOVEN'S PIANO SONATAS DISCUSSED, by Eric Blom, (Dent, 10/6).*

There never was a more imbecile notion than the twentieth-century cult of Pure Music for the simple reason that, although in one sense all music must be programme music since it is concerned with human emotions, in another sense music, in so far as it *is* music, can never be anything but pure.[1] No one could ever prove, though it is always being said, that Beethoven is a 'more philosophical' composer than Mozart; there is a very real distinction implied but it is one that can be made only in terms of quality and kind of emotional response. One has just got to admit that as soon as one starts to use words to describe the effects of music one is to some extent interpreting in non-musical terms something which is not the music but which is more or less closely related to it. The decision as to where exactly the borderline is to be drawn between what is strictly relevant to the musical experience and what isn't, rests ultimately on personal judgment, but something parallel to this seems to me to be true to varying degrees of any sort of criticism whatever.

A word, of course, is something that can be held up for inspection, it has definable meanings, even though these meanings may be very complex and not reducible to prose analysis. Yet even though we may know, ultimately, a little more about the relation of the experience of, say, *King Lear* to the emotions of 'real' life than we know about the relation to real life of the attitudes involved in a musical composition, I doubt if the matter is, in the literary case, so very much simpler; and when we consider the pictorial arts we realize only too clearly how troublesome, rather than helpful, the element of representation may be. The

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[1] *cf.* 'Music is of all arts the nearest to the abstract sense . . . the most nearly related to Nature; not to its forms but to its being.' Ferrucio Busoni.

whole question comes back, I think, to the problem of Language. One is bound to use words to communicate about *anything* ; the question is, how far is it possible to describe ' feelings ' in words at all, and what degree of precision can one hope to attain to when one is dealing with such a comparatively unfamiliar language as music. Neither the literary nor the music critic can find any *equivalent* for the created experience which the music (or the poem) is, he can only offer clues and pointers. The music critic's task is the more difficult simply because the language of music is more remote, and because no acceptable technique of analysis has as yet been so much as suggested.

Willy-nilly, then, the music critic is forced to a compromise. On the one hand he may ' account for ' the music in terms of established technical jargon—account for it as a matter of second-subjects, developments and inversions, which method is useless as a means towards value judgments (and they are the ultimate end of criticism) and which is only in a very limited sense a help towards understanding and appreciation ; or on the other hand—at the further extreme—he may substitute for the composer's music a poem (or rather a prose-fiction) of his own creation which he imagines to be a literary version of whatever it was the composer ' meant.' The first of these alternatives is unhelpful ; the second is both unhelpful and impudent. I suppose the ideal the critic should hold out for himself is to keep as close to the simple description in technical terms as is consistent with saying anything at all about the sort of experience the music precisely is, and the sort of value that may be attributed to it.

In a few cases I think it is possible to deduce the salient features of the mesh of feelings and attitudes which a musical composition is from a detailed examination of its technical characteristics with some reasonable chance of demonstrating that one's conclusions are tenable if not unanswerably right. For instance, it is possible to relate a certain factitiousness in César Franck's technique—the sugary harmonic clichés, the notorious tendency of his melodies to droop back with monotonous persistency to the acoustically weak mediant, their inability to ' grow,' the spurious because externally applied logic of his ' cyclical ' formal processes—to a certain religiose factitiousness in the composer's ways of experiencing. An equally convincing case can be made out with

reference to Puccini, and Dr. Mosco Carner has deduced the characteristic Puccinian neurasthenic emotionalism from an analysis of his melodic structure conceived entirely in terms of ' technique.'[1] Dr. Carner points out (a) how the characteristic Puccini melody (like the French *sentimental* operatic aria) begins to develop but soon slows down and comes to a stand-still—' psychologically it is the expression of a feeling that lacks the power to stretch out in a long melodic sweep, but soon loses energy and rests before a fresh start ' ; (b) how the melody, often in a minor key, is usually built on simple falling diatonic scale progressions which (c) tend to be broken up into brief phrases by the frequent appearance of the ' final ' interval of the falling fifth ; and (d) how Puccini unconsciously tries to counteract this falling tendency by grouping these brief (usually two-bar) phrases in sequences which *rise*. ' These sequences have the effect of a forcible screwing up of melody which would much rather fall.' All these traits give Puccini's melody its feeling of weariness and limpness, of something spineless and neurasthenic. The ' tired ' melody, says Dr. Carner, is Puccini's ' most personal creation and embodies perhaps his finest ideas.'

Now this is a piece of textual criticism giving rise to an account of Puccini's representative significance that is, or so it seems to me, unanswerable. It is an epitome of what musical criticism ideally ought to be. Unfortunately however, this sort of treatment seems to be applicable mainly to composers whose work is of somewhat narrow and idiosyncratic interest ; the more profound, complex and ' central ' are the experiences involved, the less possibility there seems to be of backing up one's personal opinions with an ' unanswerable ' display of critical method. Thus there are few who would deny that Elgar's use of the brass and his sequences and descending sevenths are intrinsically important aspects of his technique, but whereas some think his brass vulgar and his sevenths and sequences glutinous others think his brass stirringly heroic and his sevenths and sequences ardently expressive. I think one can demonstrate fairly clearly that Elgar's technique isn't factitious as Franck's sometimes tends to be ; but it is a

[1] *vide Puccini's Early Operas*, published in *Music and Letters*, July, 1938.

much more delicate undertaking to *justify* the judgment of sensibility that still remains to be made—to explain *why* Elgar is (as he seems to me indubitably to be) a great composer.

When one turns to such a difficult and impersonal composer as Mozart one can hardly say anything precise about the reasons why a melodic phrase is ' so and not otherwise ' ; one can suggest why at this point or that it departs from convention but one cannot indicate precisely the ' local manifestations ' of an ' interesting complexity of feeling.' Yet I don't know that this is a difficulty as peculiar to music criticism as it superficially appears. If it is true that what is communicated in a musical composition can only be the music itself, this is equally if less obviously true of a poem also ; because we cannot at present say anything validly critical about Mozart I do not think we should assume that we shall always be unable to. It is at least a start if one can accomplish the comparatively simple task of criticizing such a mannered composer as Jean Wiéner.

Connected with all this is the problem of quotation ; the music critic cannot even put the text before his readers as can the literary critic. The legitimate function of musical quotation is, as I have indicated, for location purposes ; one refers the reader to this or that passage of the score as an example of the sort of thing on which one bases this or that value judgment. But to quote long passages from orchestral scores is patently impracticable, and even if it were possible, the impression the reader would get from looking over the quotation wouldn't be the *same* as that which he would get from hearing the work performed. Music, unlike painting, is an art that unfolds itself in time ; nor, when you are listening to music, can you go back to pick up any thread you inadvertently let slip, as you can when you are reading poetry. Moreover, no two performances of a given work will ever be exactly alike (except on the gramophone). The presence of the performer, yet another element whose psychology has to be taken account of, introduces innumerable complications that the student of poetry doesn't have to contend with. It is true that the dramatic critic has to face similar difficulties, but dramatic criticism is in almost as rudimentary a condition as musical.

We have now to ask how far the two books which we have to consider—books which are ostensibly concerned with the textual

analysis of music—bear on the solution of the problems we have been discussing in the preceding paragraphs. Mr. Blom explicitly states that his book makes no pretension to being musical criticism ; it was compiled from notes which he wrote for the recordings of the Beethoven Sonata Society, and is a sort of guide-book to the piano sonatas containing a thorough survey of the structural contour of the country with a mass of usually interesting and occasionally unfamiliar historical information thrown in by the way. The book is agreeably written and, as a guide-book, is extremely useful, the notes on repeats and on the Playing of Beethoven being particularly salutary. I have only one minor grouse, and that is to deplore Mr. Blom's habit of speaking of Clementi merely as a ' historically interesting ' predecessor to the unparalleled genius of Beethoven. This, I know, is the conventional account ; and it only proves that it's time someone rehabilitated Clementi who is an essentially Italian genius, quite distinct from Beethoven, closer to Mozart and Scarlatti ; a composer whose powerful individuality of invention is expressed in melodies of a warm and luminous fertility and in harmonies of an inexhaustibly surprising chromatic audacity.

Mr. Gray's book is a less simple because more pretentious case, and try as I will I cannot discover precisely why Mr. Gray wrote it. The only excuse at this date for another technical analysis of the Preludes and Fugues would be that it should seek to provide some link between such academic analysis and the emotional interpretation of the compositions in terms of something other than music—that it should, in short, attempt some genuine musical criticism, of the kind we have been trying to define, of some of the greatest and most highly organized music which the history of civilization has to show. We have seen why this would have been a task of the utmost difficulty ; yet if the book was worth writing at all, the attempt should have been worth making, for it is surely patent that the technical analysis as such has already been more exhaustively done in many much fatter compilations by men who have devoted a lifetime to this kind of research. Yet Mr. Gray seems to offer nothing except incomplete technical analyses on the one hand and on the other comparisons of the emotional effect of the various preludes and fugues to different seasons of the year and other natural phenomena—comparisons

which can hardly be illuminating to people who do not share Mr. Gray's emotional habits. I do not see that Mr. Gray makes any effort to justify the poeticisms by the analysis or *vice versa*, I do not see any musical criticism. The most valuable part of the book is to be found in general incidental observations and in the introductory chapters.

Here Mr. Gray is as usual stimulating even when he seems most wrong-headed. His account of the comprehensiveness of Bach's genius, stretching backwards to Gregorian chant, the Netherlanders and Palestrina, forwards to Wagner and Schönberg, was worth developing more fully ; on the other hand he devotes great pains to proving to his own satisfaction that the first book of the forty-eight was conceived as an ' organic ' whole whereas the second book was a compilation of miscellaneous pieces without establishing much beyond the sincerity of his enthusiasm ; equally satisfying evidence could probably be educed to support the opposite contention. The book has a touching memorial dedication to the late Bernard van Dieren (' *Tu duca, tu signore, e tu maestro* '), but I do not see why this or more than two hundred illustrations in musical type should have led the publishers to price Mr. Gray's modest 140 pages at 8/6.

W. H. MELLERS.

## BACK NUMBERS OF 'SCRUTINY'

The following is a selection of unreprinted items from back-numbers that still remain in print.

WILL TRAINING COLLEGES BEAR SCRUTINY? by L. C. Knights. (Dec., 1932).
SCRUTINY OF EXAMINATIONS, by L. C. Knights. (Sept., 1933).
WHAT SHALL WE TEACH? by Denys Thompson. (March, 1934).
ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD, by James Smith. (June, 1934).
THE WORK OF L. H. MYERS, by D. W. Harding. (June, 1934).
HARDY THE NOVELIST, by Frank Chapman (June, 1934).
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E. M. FORSTER, by F. R. Leavis. (Sept., 1938).
' THE NEW REPUBLIC ' AND THE IDEAL WEEKLY, by H. A. Mason. (Dec., 1938).

And contributions by W. H. Mellers on music have appeared almost every quarter over the past three years.

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